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**SUBALTERN STUDIES I**  
Writings on South Asian History and Society



# Subaltern Studies I

Writings on South Asian History  
and Society

Edited by  
RANAJIT GUHA

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## Preface

The aim of the present collection of essays, the first of a series, is to promote a systematic and informed discussion of subaltern themes in the field of South Asian studies, and thus help to rectify the elitist bias characteristic of much research and academic work in this particular area.

The word 'subaltern' in the title stands for the meaning as given in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, that is, 'of inferior rank'. It will be used in these pages as a name for the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way.

The words 'history and society' in the subtitle are meant to serve as a shorthand for all that is involved in the subaltern condition. As such there is nothing in the material and spiritual aspects of that condition, past or present, which does not interest us. It will be idle of us, of course, to hope that the range of contributions to this series may even remotely match the six-point project envisaged by Antonio Gramsci in his 'Notes on Italian History'. However, within the limitations of the present state of research and our own resources we expect to publish well-written essays on subaltern themes from scholars working in the humanities and social sciences. There will be much in these pages which should relate to the history, politics, economics and sociology of subalternity as well as to the attitudes, ideologies and belief systems—in short, the culture informing that condition.

We recognize of course that subordination cannot be understood except as one of the constitutive terms in a binary relationship of which the other is dominance, for 'subaltern groups are always subject to the activity of ruling groups, even when they rebel and rise up'. The dominant groups will therefore receive in these volumes the consideration they deserve without, however, being endowed with that spurious primacy assigned to them by the long-standing tradition of elitism in South Asian studies. Indeed, it will be very much a part of our endeavour to make sure that our emphasis on the subaltern functions both as a measure of objective assessment of the role of the elite and as a critique of elitist interpretations of that role.

We believe that we are not alone in our concern about such elitism and the need to combat it. Others too have been equally unhappy about the distortions and imbalances generated by this trend in academic work on South Asian questions. We therefore hope that other scholars will join us in this venture by publishing on their own or with us their researches on subaltern themes, their critique of elitism in their respective disciplines and generally by helping us with their advice on the contents of this and subsequent volumes of *Subaltern Studies*.

Canberra  
August 1981

Ranajit Guha

## Note on Contributors

Shahid Amin is a Junior Research Fellow at Trinity College, Oxford. He is working on a book, shortly to be published, on the interrelation of sugar mills and the peasantry in eastern Uttar Pradesh in the 1930s.

David Arnold is a Lecturer in History at the University of Lancaster. He is the author of *The Congress in Tamilnadu: Nationalist Politics in South India 1919-37* (Delhi, 1977).

Partha Chatterjee is Professor of Political Science, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta. He has published *Arms, Alliances and Stability: The Development of the Structure of International Politics* (Delhi, London & New York, 1975) and is co-author of *The State of Political Theory: Some Marxist Essays* (Calcutta, 1978).

Ranajit Guha of the University of Sussex is now on secondment at the Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, Canberra. He is the author of *A Rule of Property for Bengal: An Essay on The Idea of the Permanent Settlement* (Paris, 1963)

David Hardiman is an Honorary Visiting Fellow of the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta. He is the author of *Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat: Kheda District, 1917-34* (Delhi, 1981).

Gyan Pandey is a Fellow in History at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta. He is the author of *The Ascendancy of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh 1926-34: A Study in Imperfect Mobilization* (Delhi, 1978).

# Acknowledgement

This volume of *Subaltern Studies* is the product of collective work by a team made up of Shahid Amin, David Arnold, Partha Chatterjee, Ranajit Guha, David Hardiman and Gyan Pandey, all of whom have participated equally in every detail of its planning and editing.

We are grateful to Oxford University Press for their support in publishing this and the other volumes to come in this series.

# On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India<sup>1</sup>

RANAJIT GUHA

1. The historiography of Indian nationalism has for a long time been dominated by elitism—colonialist elitism and bourgeois-nationalist elitism.<sup>2</sup> Both originated as the ideological product of British rule in India, but have survived the transfer of power and been assimilated to neo-colonialist and neo-nationalist forms of discourse in Britain and India respectively. Elitist historiography of the colonialist or neo-colonialist type counts British writers and institutions among its principal protagonists, but has its imitators in India and other countries too. Elitist historiography of the nationalist or neo-nationalist type is primarily an Indian practice but not without imitators in the ranks of liberal historians in Britain and elsewhere.

2. Both these varieties of elitism share the prejudice that the making of the Indian nation and the development of the consciousness—nationalism—which informed this process, were exclusively or predominantly elite achievements. In the colonialist and neo-colonialist historiographies these achievements are credited to British colonial rulers, administrators, policies, institutions and culture; in the nationalist and neo-nationalist writings—to Indian elite personalities, institutions, activities and ideas.

3. The first of these two historiographies defines Indian nationalism primarily as a function of stimulus and response. Based on a

<sup>1</sup>The author is grateful to all the other contributors to this volume as well as to Gautam Bhadra, Dipesh Chakrabarty and Raghavendra Chattopadhyay for their comments on an earlier version of this statement

<sup>2</sup>For a definition of the terms 'elite', 'people', 'subaltern', etc. as used in these paragraphs the reader may kindly turn to the note printed at the end of this statement



narrowly behaviouristic approach this represents nationalism as the sum of the activities and ideas by which the Indian elite responded to the institutions, opportunities, resources, etc. generated by colonialism. There are several versions of this historiography, but the central modality common to them is to describe Indian nationalism as a sort of 'learning process' through which the native elite became involved in politics by trying to negotiate the maze of institutions and the corresponding cultural complex introduced by the colonial authorities in order to govern the country. What made the elite go through this process was, according to this historiography, no lofty idealism addressed to the general good of the nation but simply the expectation of rewards in the form of a share in the wealth, power and prestige created by and associated with colonial rule; and it was the drive for such rewards with all its concomitant play of collaboration and competition between the ruling power and the native elite as well as between various elements among the latter themselves, which, we are told, was what constituted Indian nationalism.

4. The general orientation of the other kind of elitist historiography is to represent Indian nationalism as primarily an idealist venture in which the indigenous elite led the people from subjugation to freedom. There are several versions of this historiography which differ from each other in the degree of their emphasis on the role of individual leaders or elite organizations and institutions as the main or motivating force in this venture. However, the modality common to them all is to uphold Indian nationalism as a phenomenal expression of the goodness of the native elite with the antagonistic aspect of their relation to the colonial regime made, against all evidence, to look larger than its collaborationist aspect, their role as promoters of the cause of the people than that as exploiters and oppressors, their altruism and self-abnegation than their scramble for the modicum of power and privilege granted by the rulers in order to make sure of their support for the Raj. The history of Indian nationalism is thus written up as a sort of spiritual biography of the Indian elite.

5. Elitist historiography is of course not without its uses. It helps us to know more about the structure of the colonial state, the operation of its various organs in certain historical circumstances, the nature of the alignment of classes which sustained it; some aspects of the ideology of the elite as the dominant ideology of the

period; about the contradictions between the two elites and the complexities of their mutual oppositions and coalitions; about the role of some of the more important British and Indian personalities and elite organizations. Above all it helps us to understand the ideological character of historiography itself.

6. What, however, historical writing of this kind cannot do is to explain Indian nationalism for us. For it fails to acknowledge, far less interpret, the contribution made by the people *on their own*, that is, *independently of the elite* to the making and development of this nationalism. In this particular respect the poverty of this historiography is demonstrated beyond doubt by its failure to understand and assess the mass articulation of this nationalism except, negatively, as a law and order problem, and positively, if at all, either as a response to the charisma of certain elite leaders or in the currently more fashionable terms of vertical mobilization by the manipulation of factions. The involvement of the Indian people in vast numbers, sometimes in hundreds of thousands or even millions, in nationalist activities and ideas is thus represented as a diversion from a supposedly 'real' political process, that is, the grinding away of the wheels of the state apparatus and of elite institutions geared to it, or it is simply credited, as an act of ideological appropriation, to the influence and initiative of the elite themselves. The bankruptcy of this historiography is clearly exposed when it is called upon to explain such phenomena as the anti-Rowlatt upsurge of 1919 and the Quit India movement of 1942—to name only two of numerous instances of popular initiative asserting itself in the course of nationalist campaigns in defiance or absence of elite control. How can such one-sided and blinkered historiography help us to understand the profound displacements, well below the surface of elite politics, which made Chauri-Chaura or the militant demonstrations of solidarity with the RIN mutineers possible ?

7. This inadequacy of elitist historiography follows directly from the narrow and partial view of politics to which it is committed by virtue of its class outlook. In all writings of this kind the parameters of Indian politics are assumed to be or enunciated as exclusively or primarily those of the institutions introduced by the British for the government of the country and the corresponding sets of laws, policies, attitudes and other elements of the superstructure. Inevitably, therefore, a historiography hamstrung by

such a definition can do no more than to equate politics with the aggregation of activities and ideas of those who were directly involved in operating these institutions, that is, the colonial rulers and their *elevés*—the dominant groups in native society—to the extent that their mutual transactions were thought to be all there was to Indian nationalism, the domain of the latter is regarded as coincident with that of politics.

8. What clearly is left out of this un-historical historiography is the *politics of the people*. For parallel to the domain of elite politics there existed throughout the colonial period another domain of Indian politics in which the principal actors were not the dominant groups of the indigenous society or the colonial authorities but the subaltern classes and groups constituting the mass of the labouring population and the intermediate strata in town and country—that is, the people. This was an *autonomous* domain, for it neither originated from elite politics nor did its existence depend on the latter. It was traditional only in so far as its roots could be traced back to pre-colonial times, but it was by no means archaic in the sense of being outmoded. Far from being destroyed or rendered virtually ineffective, as was elite politics of the traditional type by the intrusion of colonialism, it continued to operate vigorously in spite of the latter, adjusting itself to the conditions prevailing under the Raj and in many respects developing entirely new strains in both form and content. As modern as indigenous elite politics, it was distinguished by its relatively greater depth in time as well as in structure.

9. One of the more important features of this politics related precisely to those aspects of mobilization which are so little explained by elitist historiography. Mobilization in the domain of elite politics was achieved vertically whereas in that of subaltern politics this was achieved horizontally. The instrumentation of the former was characterized by a relatively greater reliance on the colonial adaptations of British parliamentary institutions and the residua of semi-feudal political institutions of the pre-colonial period; that of the latter relied rather more on the traditional organization of kinship and territoriality or on class associations depending on the level of the consciousness of the people involved. Elite mobilization tended to be relatively more legalistic and constitutionalist in orientation, subaltern mobilization relatively more violent. The former was, on the whole, more cautious and

controlled, the latter more spontaneous. Popular mobilization in the colonial period was realized in its most comprehensive form in peasant uprisings. However, in many historic instances involving large masses of the working people and petty bourgeoisie in the urban areas too the figure of mobilization derived directly from the paradigm of peasant insurgency.

10. The ideology operative in this domain, taken as a whole, reflected the diversity of its social composition with the outlook of its leading elements dominating that of the others at any particular time and within any particular event. However, in spite of such diversity one of its invariant features was a notion of resistance to elite domination. This followed from the subalternity common to all the social constituents of this domain and as such distinguished it sharply from that of elite politics. This ideological element was of course not uniform in quality or density in all instances. In the best of cases it enhanced the concreteness, focus and tension of subaltern political action. However, there were occasions when its emphasis on sectional interests disequibrated popular movements in such a way as to create economistic diversions and sectarian splits, and generally to undermine horizontal alliances.

11. Yet another set of the distinctive features of this politics derived from the conditions of exploitation to which the subaltern classes were subjected in varying degrees as well as from its relation to the productive labour of the majority of its protagonists, that is, workers and peasants, and to the manual and intellectual labour respectively of the non-industrial urban poor and the lower sections of the petty bourgeoisie. The experience of exploitation and labour endowed this politics with many idioms, norms and values which put it in a category apart from elite politics.

12. These and other distinctive features (the list is by no means exhaustive) of the politics of the people did not of course appear always in the pure state described in the last three paragraphs. The impact of living contradictions modified them in the course of their actualization in history. However, with all such modifications they still helped to demarcate the domain of subaltern politics from that of elite politics. The co-existence of these two domains or streams, which can be sensed by intuition and proved by demonstration as well, was the index of an important historical truth, that is, the *failure of the Indian bourgeoisie to speak for the nation*. There were vast areas in the life and consciousness of the people

which were never integrated into their hegemony. The *structural dichotomy* that arose from this is a datum of Indian history of the colonial period, which no one who sets out to interpret it can ignore without falling into error.

13. Such dichotomy did not, however, mean that these two domains were hermetically sealed off from each other and there was no contact between them. On the contrary, there was a great deal of overlap arising precisely from the effort made from time to time by the more advanced elements among the indigenous elite, especially the bourgeoisie, to integrate them. Such effort when linked to struggles which had more or less clearly defined anti-imperialist objectives and were consistently waged, produced some splendid results. Linked, on other occasions, to movements which either had no firm anti-imperialist objectives at all or had lost them in the course of their development and deviated into legalist, constitutionalist or some other kind of compromise with the colonial government, they produced some spectacular retreats and nasty reversions in the form of sectarian strife. In either case the braiding together of the two strands of elite and subaltern politics led invariably to explosive situations indicating that the masses mobilized by the elite to fight for their own objectives managed to break away from their control and put the characteristic imprint of popular politics on campaigns initiated by the upper classes.

14. However, the initiatives which originated from the domain of subaltern politics were not, on their part, powerful enough to develop the nationalist movement into a full-fledged struggle for national liberation. The working class was still not sufficiently mature in the objective conditions of its social being and in its consciousness as a class-for-itself, nor was it firmly allied yet with the peasantry. As a result it could do nothing to take over and complete the mission which the bourgeoisie had failed to realize. The outcome of it all was that the numerous peasant uprisings of the period, some of them massive in scope and rich in anti-colonialist consciousness, waited in vain for a leadership to raise them above localism and generalize them into a nationwide anti-imperialist campaign. In the event, much of the sectional struggle of workers, peasants and the urban petty bourgeoisie either got entangled in economism or, wherever politicized, remained, for want of a revolutionary leadership, far too fragmented to form

effectively into anything like a national liberation movement.

15. It is the study of this *historic failure of the nation to come to its own*, a failure due to the inadequacy of the bourgeoisie as well as of the working class to lead it into a decisive victory over colonialism and a bourgeois-democratic revolution of either the classic nineteenth-century type under the hegemony of the bourgeoisie or a more modern type under the hegemony of workers and peasants, that is, a 'new democracy'— *it is the study of this failure which constitutes the central problematic of the historiography of colonial India*. There is no one given way of investigating this problematic. Let a hundred flowers blossom and we don't mind even the weeds. Indeed we believe that in the practice of historiography even the elitists have a part to play if only by way of teaching by negative examples. But we are also convinced that elitist historiography should be resolutely fought by developing an alternative discourse based on the rejection of the spurious and un-historical monism characteristic of its view of Indian nationalism and on the recognition of the co-existence and interaction of the elite and subaltern domains of politics.

16. We are sure that we are not alone in our concern about the present state of the political historiography of colonial India and in seeking a way out. The elitism of modern Indian historiography is an oppressive fact resented by many others, students, teachers and writers like ourselves. They may not all subscribe to what has been said above on this subject in exactly the way in which we have said it. However, we have no doubt that many other historiographical points of view and practices are likely to converge close to where we stand. Our purpose in making our own views known is to promote such a convergence. We claim no more than to try and indicate an orientation and hope to demonstrate in practice that this is feasible. In any discussion which may ensue we expect to learn a great deal not only from the agreement of those who think like us but also from the criticism of those who don't.

A note on the terms 'elite', 'people', 'subaltern', etc.  
as used above

The term 'elite' has been used in this statement to signify *dominant* groups, foreign as well as indigenous. The *dominant foreign* groups included all the non-Indian, that is, mainly British officials of the colonial state and foreign industrialists, merchants, financiers, planters, landlords and missionaries.

The *dominant indigenous* groups included classes and interests operating at two levels. At the *all-India level* they included the biggest feudal magnates, the most important representatives of the industrial and mercantile bourgeoisie and native recruits to the uppermost levels of the bureaucracy

At the *regional and local levels* they represented such classes and other elements as were *either* members of the dominant all-India groups included in the previous category *or* if belonging to social strata hierarchically inferior to those of the dominant all-India groups still *acted in the interests of the latter and not in conformity to interests corresponding truly to their own social being*.

Taken as a whole and in the abstract this last category of the elite was *heterogeneous* in its composition and thanks to the uneven character of regional economic and social developments, *differed from area to area*. The same class or element which was dominant in one area according to the definition given above, could be among the dominated in another. This could and did create many ambiguities and contradictions in attitudes and alliances, especially among the lowest strata of the rural gentry, impoverished landlords, rich peasants and upper-middle peasants all of whom belonged, *ideally speaking*, to the category of 'people' or 'subaltern classes', as defined below. It is the task of research to investigate, identify and measure the *specific* nature and degree of the *deviation* of these elements from the ideal and situate it historically.

The terms 'people' and 'subaltern classes' have been used as synonymous throughout this note. The social groups and elements included in this category represent *the demographic difference between the total Indian population and all those whom we have described as the 'elite'*. Some of these classes and groups such as the lesser rural gentry, impoverished landlords, rich peasants and upper-middle peasants who 'naturally' ranked among the 'people' and the 'subaltern', could under certain circumstances act for the 'elite', as explained above, and therefore be classified as such in some local or regional situations—an ambiguity which it is up to the historian to sort out on the basis of a close and judicious reading of his evidence.

# Agrarian Relations and Communalism in Bengal, 1926-1935<sup>1</sup>

PARTHA CHATTERJEE

## I

When in 1928 a Bill to amend the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885 was brought before the Bengal Legislative Council, the alignments among the Indian members of the house, elected on the basis of what was still a fairly restricted suffrage, seemed to many a perfectly accurate reflection of the relations between the various organized political forces in the province. For whereas Muslim members, almost without exception, supported—in vain—all motions aimed against landlords and in favour of *rai-yats*, under-*rai-yats* or sharecroppers, the Hindu members of the house, consisting in large part of Swarajya Party members, consistently held a pro-landlord position and, in association with the official bloc, managed to carry the house on most occasions.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the paradox of the party of non-cooperation supporting an official bill with such remarkable fidelity was so obvious that F. E. James, a non-official European member, could not resist congratulating the Government 'on the acquisition of its new-found ally—the Swarajya Party'.

Most of the Muslim members of the house had, of course, been elected from the reserved Muhammadan constituencies of the districts of eastern and northern Bengal. And given the common

<sup>1</sup>I am grateful to Ujjwal Kanti Das and Madhumati Dutta for their assistance in collecting much of the material used here, and to Dipesh Chakrabarty and my colleagues at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, for discussions on earlier drafts of this essay.

<sup>2</sup>For a fuller discussion of the politics of the Tenancy Act Amendment of 1928, see Partha Chatterjee, 'Agrarian Relations and Politics in Bengal: Some Considerations on the Making of the Tenancy Act Amendment 1928', Occasional Paper 30, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta.



perception about the agrarian structure of those districts—a predominantly Hindu landowning class, a predominantly Muslim tenantry—the simple structural explanation of organized communal politics in Bengal came to be formulated with obvious clarity: the dominant upper-caste Hindu *bhadralok*, politically organized under the Congress, sought to protect and preserve the rights and privileges of the zamindari and intermediate tenure-holding rentier interests, whereas Muslim leaders of eastern Bengal, relying on the support of the Muslim *praja*, sought to uphold the rights of *rai-yats* and found themselves in opposition to the Congress. This was the basic structural foundation of the ‘communal’ divide in organized politics in Bengal, and the experience of the Tenancy Act debate of 1928, which dramatically brought this to the surface, appears to have finally convinced the new Muslim leadership of eastern Bengal of the need for independent political organization. ‘Neither in terms of the Muslim interest’, writes Abul Mansur Ahmed, a Congress-Khilafatist who later played a crucial role in both the Krishak Praja Party and the Muslim League, ‘nor of the *praja* interest, was it possible any longer to rely on the Congress.’<sup>3</sup>

If one, however, examined even the aggregate quantitative indicators of the religious or caste composition of the rent-receiving classes in the districts of eastern and northern Bengal provided in the census tables, it would become apparent that the situation was not so simple. Table 1 shows that of those whose principal source of livelihood was income from rent of land,<sup>4</sup> upper-caste Hindus formed a large but not overwhelming part, whereas the proportion of Muslims was not by any means insignificant. The disparities in terms of religion were far more pronounced in the fields of higher education or the professions or

<sup>3</sup>Abul Mansur Ahmad, *Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchas Bachhar* (Dacca, 1970), p. 61.

<sup>4</sup>The definition used in this Census was based on an economic criterion rather than on the designations under the Bengal Tenancy Act: ‘Zamindars and rai-yats who do not cultivate but sublet their land come under the category of rent-receivers, while zamindars and rai-yats who cultivate their land and do not sublet it are rent-payers. It would have been preferable, had it been permissible, to have laid down merely that a man was to be entered simply by the designation ordinarily recognized, such as zamindari and cultivation. Entries of this kind are quite sufficient for compilation and would have saved a good deal of correspondence and searching of mind among the census staff.’ *Census of India, 1911*, vol. v, pt 1, pp. 532-3. If there were errors in this enumeration, therefore, they would probably lie in an underestimation of Muslim rent-receivers, many of whom in eastern Bengal would ordinarily have been recognized as *rai-yats* rather than as zamindars.

government employment, which immediately points to the possible patterns of contending political organization around those specific interests among the educated sections of the population.

Table 1. *Religious composition of rent-receivers (excluding dependents)*  
(as percentage of total rent-receivers in each Division)

	Muslim	Upper-caste Hindu	Others
Rajshahi Division (excluding Darjeeling)	37.22	20.04	42.74
Dacca Division	33.44	38.50	18.06
Chittagong Division	49.13	30.74	20.13

Source Computed from *Census of India, 1911*, vol. v, pt 2, pp. 222-3 and 379-81, Table XV, and app. to Table XVI (pt II).

Note 'Upper-caste Hindu' in this Table means Brahman, Baidya or Kayastha. Of 'Others' in the Rajshahi Division, the Rajbangshi were the largest single caste (8.51%).

Here lay the seeds of 'communal' demands for education, employment or political representation, now described in sufficient detail in the historical literature.<sup>5</sup> As far as agrarian relations in eastern Bengal were concerned, the available evidence seems to suggest that the crucial element which deflected peasant agitations into anti-Hindu movements was not that most zamindars were Hindu and that the grievances of the predominantly Muslim tenantry consequently took on anti-Hindu overtones, but the fact that Muslim rent-receivers, where they did exist, were considered part of the peasant community whereas Hindu zamindars and talukdars were not. The evidence points, in fact, to structures of political authority and ideology quite autonomous from the straightforward representation of the agrarian structure. It is a preliminary analysis of some aspects of these political structures that will be the object of this essay.

## II

We will propose here an analytical framework somewhat different from those conventionally used. We will distinguish

<sup>5</sup>See, for instance, Sufia Ahmed, *Muslim Community in Bengal, 1884-1912* (Dacca, 1974); Shila Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal, 1939-1947* (New Delhi, 1976).

between three *modes* of political power which may exist (even co-exist) in a particular state formation or structure of power relationships. These modes are distinguished in terms of the *basis* of particular power relationships in the ordered and repeated performance of social activities, e.g. the particular pattern of allocation of rights or entitlements over material objects (sometimes extended to non-material objects such as knowledge) in a definite system of social production. The three modes of political power we will call the *communal*, the *feudal* and the *bourgeois* modes.

The communal mode of political power, and of legitimate political authority, arises typically in societies based predominantly on agricultural production, where there is, as Marx puts it, 'the natural unity of labour with its material presuppositions', where 'the individual relates to himself as proprietor, as master of the conditions of his reality . . . [and] to the others as co-proprietors, as so many incarnations of the common property, or as independent proprietors like himself.'<sup>6</sup> The crucial element here lies in the fact that land, which in this situation is the fundamental basis of life and social production, appears not as a product of labour but as its presupposition, as something which must be given or found before the labour-process can commence. 'The earth is the great workshop, the arsenal which furnishes both means and material of labour, as well as the seat, the *base* of the community. They relate naively to it as the *property of the community*, of the community producing and reproducing itself in living labour. Each individual conducts himself only as a link, as a member of the community as *proprietor* or *possessor*. The *real appropriation* through the labour process happens under these *presuppositions*, which are not themselves the product of labour, but appear as its natural or *divine* presuppositions.'<sup>7</sup> Whatever the specific institutional form of individual right or entitlement to the use of land (and Marx mentions at different times at least four such institutional forms which he calls the Asiatic or Oriental, the classical, the Germanic and the Slavonic), it flows from the prior authority of the community over the entire land; the place of the individual in the social ordering of rights is determined by his membership in the community; the collective is prior to the individual parts and its authority larger than the mere sum of the parts. 'In all these

<sup>6</sup>Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, tr. Martin Nicolaus (Harmondsworth, 1973), p. 471.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 472.

forms—in which landed property and agriculture form the basis of the economic order, and where the economic aim is hence the production of use values, i.e. the *reproduction of the individual* within the specific relation to the commune in which he is its basis . . . the individual relates simply to the objective conditions of labour as being his; . . . the chief objective condition of labour does not itself appear as a *product* of labour, but is clearly there as nature; . . . but this *relation* to land and soil, to the earth, as the property of the labouring individual . . . is instantly mediated by the naturally arisen, spontaneous, more or less historically developed and modified presence of the individual as *member of a commune*. . . . His relation to the objective conditions of labour is mediated through his presence as member of the commune; at the same time, the real presence of the commune is determined by the specific form of the individual's property in the objective conditions of labour.<sup>8</sup> 'Property, then, originally means—in its Asiatic, Slavonic, ancient classical, Germanic form—the relation of the working subject to the conditions of his production or reproduction as his own. It will therefore have different forms depending on the conditions of this production . . . This relation as proprietor . . . presupposes the individual defined as a member of a clan or community (whose property the individual himself is up to a certain point).'<sup>9</sup>

Political power in such a community would therefore be organized as the authority of the entire collectivity. It is possible for this authority even to lack a definite institutional form. It is also not necessarily democratic, for collective authority may in fact be vested in the institution of a chief or patriarch, although a community of free peasant proprietors would be more likely to have relatively democratic institutional forms. Whatever the specific institutional form, political power in agricultural communities of this kind we will categorize under the communal mode of power.

The *feudal* mode of power is characterized fundamentally by sheer superiority of physical force, i.e. a relationship of domination. It is founded on conquest or some other means of physical subordination of a subject population. In our conception, it denotes not just the state formation which accompanies the feudal mode of production, but may in fact serve to describe political institutions corresponding to a whole range of forms of organization of production based on direct physical control over the

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 485-6.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 495.

life-processes of the producers. At one extreme, one may have production by slaves where both the life-processes of the producers as well as the labour-process itself are controlled by the master. At the other extreme, one can think of a free peasantry which is only required to make a periodic tax-payment or a regular tribute to the agent of an external state machinery. In between there could be various degrees of serfdom, involving different degrees of control over the life-processes of the peasantry in order to collect a part of the social product as rent. Political domination, which in all of these forms of production-organization is the prerequisite for rights or claims on the social product, we will classify under the feudal mode of state power.

In agrarian societies where peasant communities are formally organized into large political units such as kingdoms or empires, these two modes of power are intertwined in the state formation. Characteristically, there is, on the one hand, a formal state machinery whose institutional forms might vary from the centralized bureaucracy of an absolutist monarchy to the very loose confederation of virtually sovereign feudal barons, and on the other, peasant communities either possessing or lacking formal and regularly functioning institutions of communal authority. The respective allocation of claims or entitlements between the feudal power and the community is always the result of tension between these two forces. One could think of, and perhaps discern in actual historical situations, a state of equilibrium arrived at through a process of conflict and struggle where the peasant community accedes to a particular quantum of feudal exaction and the feudal power recognizes the existence and continuation of certain communal rights.

State formations in most medieval kingdoms display the coexistence of these two alternative and contending modes of power in specific state institutions<sup>10</sup> and in the recognition of customary

<sup>10</sup>Gierke, for instance, analyses the political doctrines of medieval Europe in terms of the tension between the two contending concepts of Absolute Monarchy and Popular Sovereignty. 'The relationship between Monarch and Community was steadily conceived as a relationship which involved reciprocal Rights and Duties. . . . Therefore the power of a Ruler is not absolute, but limited by appointed bounds . . . every command which exceeded the limits of the Ruler's authority was for his subjects a mere nullity and obliged none to obedience.' 'It is a distinctive trait of medieval doctrine that within every human group it decisively recognizes an aboriginal and active Right of the group taken as a whole.' . . . 'Concrete cases might demand the admission that the Power of the State had its origin or extension in violent conquest or successful usurpation. Still in such cases, so it was said, an ex

rights and practices within the body of formal law and administrative procedures.<sup>11</sup> But it is always an uneasy and potentially unstable situation, and provides the analytical ground in the theory of the state for the study of medieval peasant revolts.

Before we consider the implications of this framework for the analysis of politics in the period of the break-up of feudalism, or more generally of pre-capitalist societies in transition, let us look very briefly at what we will call the *bourgeois* mode of political power. The principles here are well known: the separation of the state from the sphere of civil society, the elevation of the state into a neutral institution which does not recognize real inequalities in society, where the individual becomes the unit in political and legal transactions, society is conceived of as the result of a contract between individuals and all individuals irrespective of differences of race, religion, language, education, wealth or property become equal subjects before law, where the domination of capitalists over wage-labourers and the appropriation of surplus-value are ensured not by physical control over the life-processes of producers but by complete control over the labour-process secured by rights of property over the means of production and the impersonal operation of the market, and finally, where the political domination of the bourgeoisie in the political process is sustained by institutions of representative government.<sup>12</sup> It need only be remembered here that the establishment of the capitalist state and the sway of the bourgeois mode of power requires not so much the complete abolition of feudal state institutions, many of which in fact continue to exist without disturbing in any way the effective hegemony of the bourgeoisie over society, but rather the destruction of the peasant communities and of the bases of peasant-

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*post facto* legitimation by the express or tacit consent of the People was indispensable if the Ruler was to have a good title to Rulership' Otto von Gierke, *Political Theories of the Middle Ages*, tr. F. W. Maitland (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 34, 37, 40. For a historical analysis of medieval state formations in Europe along these lines, see Heinrich Mitteis, *The State in the Middle Ages*, tr. H. F. Orton (Amsterdam, 1975)

<sup>11</sup>In medieval England, for instance, the lord could exercise his disciplinary jurisdiction on his own authority, but could not do so in proprietary disputes where a tenant could not be made to answer without writ. It is precisely in the matter of the proprietary jurisdiction of the lord that a host of customary practices had to be recognized. S. F. C. Milsom, *The Legal Framework of English Feudalism* (Cambridge, 1976)

<sup>12</sup>The classic statements of these principles are in Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'*, tr. Annette Jolin and Joseph O'Malley (Cambridge, 1977) and 'On the Jewish Question' in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 3 (Moscow, 1975).

communal ideology. It is this crucial aspect of the bourgeois political revolution that is accomplished in the phase of the so-called primitive accumulation.<sup>13</sup>

Our present concern is with the applicability of this framework to the political conditions of colonial India, and of Bengal in particular. The specific constitution of the peasant community in India is likely to vary between the 'joint villages' of northern India, where peasant holdings are considered shares of a unit estate, revenue liabilities are joint and where the village has no headman but a panchayat as the formal institution of collective authority, and the 'raiyatwari villages' in most other parts of India with separate peasant holdings, no joint liability for revenue, no jointly owned waste or commons and a headman as the symbol of collective authority.<sup>14</sup> It is also likely to vary with the specific social constitution of the division of labour in particular villages, the relations between castes including the possible effects of caste mobility, the nature of absorption of immigrant populations into the original community or of the subjugation or eviction from the land of older settlers by new ones, and so on. But everywhere there will be a core population principally of peasant cultivators identifiable and active as a peasant community. Such communities constitute the *smallest* collective unit in the political life of rural India.

But there is also a process of aggregation of communities, or rather of their perceived *inclusion* into membership of larger communities. This is a process which is both cultural and political, and is built upon the expansion and organization of economic activities such as trade or revenue collection. In most large agrarian societies, there would in fact be a hierarchy of possible communal identifications, the *largest* such cultural community being the nationality united by a common language and a common literary tradition. The ideological significance of each such identification or its salience in particular historical situations depends enormously on specific elements of politics: this in fact often constitutes the principal aspect of popular politics in agrarian societies. But unlike the individual in pluralist theory whose political identity is riven by 'cross-cutting cleavages', here it is always the smaller community as a whole which is included in the larger one.

<sup>13</sup>Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, tr. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (Moscow, 1971), pp. 667-93.

<sup>14</sup>B.H. Baden-Powell, *The Origin and Growth of Village Communities in India* (London, 1899); *The Indian Village Community* (Delhi, 1972).

The history of medieval India is replete with instances of peasant communities acting to protect what were conceived to be their communal rights against unjust encroachment by an external state power, whether it be local feudal lords or the functionaries of an imperial bureaucracy. The establishment of colonial rule in Bengal in the mid-eighteenth century led to two major consequences with respect to this particular aspect of political life: one, the gradual evolution of a formal machinery of state and an institutionalized political process based on bourgeois constitutional principles, and two, an entirely new process of differentiation among the peasantry caused by colonial extraction and the extended operation of a market economy in rural areas. The first process was very gradual and the colonial state machinery continued for a long time as an admixture of feudal and bourgeois modes: a simple appropriation of older forms and symbols of authority and methods of administrative practice with the object of establishing and holding a position of physical domination over a subject population, along with the introduction of bourgeois notions of rule of law, equality before the law, impersonal procedures of administration and justice, and the evolution of a political process in which the government dealt with bodies which claimed to *represent* in some way or other the citizens of the country. It was the latter process which, by the twentieth century, developed into a full-blown arena of *organized* politics among the propertied and educated in Bengal, with contending parties and factions each seeking to *mobilize* support among the rest of the population in order to strengthen its claims of representativeness. This politics of organized mobilization gained new dimensions from the 1920s with the Khilafat-non-cooperation movements and the periodic extensions of the suffrage.

On the other hand, the relatively unorganized world of politics among the people continued to exist, and exist quite autonomously. When it came into contact with the world of organized politics, it left its imprint on the latter. As it was, the structures of organized politics, conceived though they were in likeness to the liberal principles of representative organization, did not quite turn out that way, for even among elite politicians there grew such curious amalgams of liberal ideas and religious-communal conceptions as 'composite patriotism' and *swadeshi samaj* with



'federal' leadership.<sup>15</sup> So did the colonial state in India fashion its own institutions and administrative procedures in order to subjugate and rule over a population organized as communities: in the process, bourgeois principles of equality before the law or neutrality of the state were thoroughly compromised, often abandoned. On the other hand, the notion of the community continued to act as a live force in the consciousness of the peasantry, which still treated feudal landlords or agents of the state as outside claimants on their obedience and their produce. The community's relations with these outsiders were bound by norms of reciprocity, formulated in an entire system of religious beliefs—origin myths, sacred histories, legends—which laid down the principles of political ethics, and were coded into a series of acts and symbols denoting authority and obedience, benevolence and obligation, or oppression and revolt.

Of course, there were differences in the way a peasant community would view itself *vis-à-vis* landlords who were clearly outsiders as opposed to those who had risen from the peasantry to become part of the *rentier* class. These variations become particularly crucial when considering the politics of a period where differentiation was clearly occurring among the peasantry, but at different rates in different regions of the province. Differentiation also tends to undermine the material basis of the existence of the sense of community, although ideologically community is a very strong force. The identification of the precise structural and political conditions in which community and class become active ideological elements in the politics of the peasantry still remains a major task of historical analysis. The section below touches upon some of these questions in the course of consideration of a limited set of materials relating to 'communalism', i.e. the politics of Hindu-Muslim relations, in the period 1925-35.

<sup>15</sup>Bipin Chandra Pal had visualized a federal India in which the units were to be the religious communities—Hindu, Muslim, Christian, aboriginal. Rabindranath Tagore in 1905 had wanted a *swadeshi samaj* headed jointly by a Hindu and a Muslim. The *Bangabasi* suggested in 1908 that the adherents of different religions should 'each form a party of their own' and then cooperate among themselves. See Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903-1908* (New Delhi, 1973), pp. 422-4. Chittaranjan Das's Hindu-Muslim Pact was ideologically much along the same lines. For a discussion, see Partha Chatterjee, 'Some Considerations on the Making of the Tenancy Act Amendment 1928', *op. cit.*

## III

Ideologically, the tension between an original peasant community and a feudal power seeking to impose its domination is more distinctly identifiable in cases where the feudal power is clearly an 'outsider', racially or culturally distinct from the mass of this peasantry. The contradiction would be a lot less apparent in cases where certain elements from within the original community have on the basis of certain original privileges (e.g. the families of patriarchs or first settlers or priests) reached a position of appropriating a surplus from the producers and compelling obedience by the use or threat of use of physical force.

The tension between a peasant community and an external exploitative force also becomes clear in the case of the operation of outside traders or money-lenders, particularly when they are racially or culturally distinct from the peasantry. This is the most relevant structural dimension in the analysis of the acrimonious and violent debate about music before mosques in Bengal in the mid-1920s. The numerous conflicts about musical processions passing in front of mosques mainly originated in towns or semi-urban concentrations in the districts of eastern, central and northern Bengal, regions with large Muslim peasant populations. The towns inevitably had larger Hindu concentrations than the neighbouring villages. Many of the more prosperous landlords resided in those towns, for they often also had professional or commercial interests. The towns were also centres of petty retail trade as well as wholesale trade in the commercial produce of the surrounding countryside. They were, in fact, the seat of both feudal and commercial exploitation of the peasantry and were thus inseparably linked with its life. Further, the musical processions in question were usually immersion ceremonies following one or the other Hindu *pūja*, patronized by landlords, traders and other Hindu professionals and an important institution of demonstration of feudal wealth and power. Or else, the dispute was about *sankirtan* processions organized and financed by Vaishnav trading communities. The ideological significance to the Muslim masses of the apparently religious question of music before mosques must, therefore, be seen in this specific structural context.

The evidence from most of these districts suggests that the disputes were new, arising in many cases where precedent was

difficult to establish, such as the coming up of new mosques or changes in the route of processions, but in many cases objections to the passing of processions with music were made in clear disregard of local custom. In the case of the dispute over the Janmastami procession in Dacca, leading to the riots of 1926, for instance, the question of precedent was clear:

The *Janmastami* procession in Dacca is a time-honoured institution which is said to have been instituted in the time of the Muhammadan government and to have been encouraged by the Muhammadan rulers. It brings in a large number of visitors to the town and stimulates trade and provides employment for a large number of people. It has been the custom to employ Muhammadan musicians and labourers in the procession and wealthy Muhammadans have lent their elephants and horses and given other assistance, while the Muhammadans of the town and surrounding villages have crowded the streets while the procession passed. The processions are managed by the Dacca Basak families, the cost being met from a trust fund created for the purpose and subscriptions.<sup>16</sup>

But in 1926 objections were raised by Muslim leaders belonging mainly to the District Moslem Association, both in regard to the playing of music when the procession passed a mosque and about the participation of Muslims in the procession. When the District Magistrate and the Nawab of Dacca attempted to arrange a compromise meeting the Moslem Association argued:

... it is not sufficient to consider only custom in arriving at a decision on a point which is so seriously agitating the minds of the leaders of the Hindus and the Musalmans all over India, totally ignoring the religious point of view about which the Musalmans present were not competent to give any opinion nor has this Association any such right, except the learned *ulemas*.<sup>17</sup>

The Commissioner of the Presidency Division summed up the position in very definite terms:

From the reports of the District Magistrates of this division, it would appear that the trouble invariably has been caused by the Muhammadans who have been in most cases the aggressors, defiant of authority,

<sup>16</sup>A.H. Clayton, Commnr., Dacca Division, to A.N. Moberly, Chief Sec., 4 Oct. 1926, GB Pol. File 501/26, WBSA.

<sup>17</sup>A.M.A. Hamid, Honorary Sec., District Moslem Association, Dacca, to A.K. Ghuznavi, 27 Aug. 1926, GB Pol. File 501/26, WBSA.

and the least amenable to conciliatory methods. In many cases, even after accepting a compromise, they have caused trouble when a procession had actually to pass a mosque according to the arrangement arrived at.

That the trouble is entirely new I can speak from my own experience during the last 33 years in different parts of Bengal.<sup>18</sup>

The usual form of action taken by the Hindu residents of these towns during such conflicts was the boycott—either a complete shut-down of shops and establishments or, more often, a refusal to transact business with Muslims. It was, in fact, the boycott of Muslim carters by Hindu traders and of Muslim carriage-drivers by organized groups of Hindu students that led to the riots in Dacca city in 1926.<sup>19</sup> There were similar cases of the boycott of Muslim dyers, bandsmen, coachmen and syces by Marwari traders in the disturbed Barabazar area of Calcutta before and after the 1926 riots in the city.<sup>20</sup> The nature of popular Muslim feeling in such situations is revealed remarkably in a speech delivered on one such occasion in Kushtia by Afsaruddin Ahmed, brother of Shamsuddin Ahmed, the important Congress-Khilafatist leader of Nadia.

Musalman of Kustia! You are poor, but do you realize what your position has become? Do you know what the Hindus of Kustia are doing? They are trying to cripple the labourers, trying to starve the Muslims to death. During the disturbances in Calcutta not one Hindu shopkeeper sold anything to a Muslim. You did not pay heed then. Now look at what's happening to you . . . You slaughter and eat your own cow and they bring charges against you. The Hindus take their idols in front of you, but nothing happens to them. There are proceedings in court against you because you had slaughtered a cow in your *Masjid*. They kick us, beat us with their shoes, and we take it. . . . Do not hope any more to get work as porters in the Marwari's warehouse; get prepared for that. The Hindus want to provoke the *lereys* [pejorative slang used by Hindus to describe Muslims]. . . . What is this seven days' *hartal* about? It's the arrogance of money, the arrogance of learning; it's to put you into difficulty. . . . If the Hindus can play music before our *Masjid*, so can Muslims slaughter cows in their own houses.

<sup>18</sup>J.N. Gupta, Commnr., Presidency Division, to W.D.R. Prentice, Chief Sec., 15 March 1927, GB Pol. File 51/27, WBSA.

<sup>19</sup>Clayton to Moberly, 4 Oct. 1926, GB Pol. File 501/26, WBSA.

<sup>20</sup>A.N. Moberly to J. Crerar, Home Sec., G.I., 23 Sept. 1926, GB Pol. File 516/26, WBSA.

This *hartal* is to slaughter you. . . . If you had a timber warehouse like Gaurishankar Babu, there would have been no *hartal* in the grocery shops or cloth stores. . . . They had a meeting in Gopinath's house, and porters, labourers, oilpressers have been boycotted. . . . The Hindus have said, 'We shall not buy from Musalmans': that is a declaration of war.<sup>21</sup>

The whole controversy regarding the violation of the 'religious rights' of Musalmans and organized Hindu assertion of 'civil rights' came to a head in the Patuakhali Satyagraha of 1926-7.

Patuakhali is in a locality where there is a large preponderance of Muhammadans over the Hindus, the population being about 5 to 1 in the subdivision and the revenue thana, and about 4 to 1 in the head-quarter police-station. In the municipality, however, the communities are almost equal in numbers. In the past there are no records of any disputes on the subject of music before mosques. . . . there was a long standing and well recognized practice under which Hindu processions out of regard for the feelings of the Muhammadans . . . stopped music for a distance of about 80 yards [from the mosque].<sup>22</sup>

But a new mosque had come up recently, a few yards down the road from the old one, and the question was whether the same privilege should be extended to the new mosque as well. The situation, however, was hardly conducive to an amicable solution.

Latterly as the result of the forces operating in the Indian Moslem world the local Muhammadans began, among other things, to object to attending the festivities connected with certain Hindu festivals and to oppose the performance by Hindus of certain ceremonies in certain places of which the *Saraswati Puja* in schools was probably the most prominent. . . . [The Hindus deliberately organized] a procession with music along the District Board road near the mosques in defiance of the recognized practice. There was no religious festival at the time, and the object was merely to annoy the Muhammadans in which object they succeeded.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup>Transcript of speech by M. Afsaruddin Ahmed at Kushtia, Nadia, 28 Feb 1927. 'Afsaruddin appears to be a religious preacher by profession and has some landed property. He was until very recently an extreme non-co-operative, and was convicted in 1922. . . . Though he still calls himself a swarajist, he is believed to be behind all local communal agitation.' A.F.M. Rahman, Subdivisional Officer, Kushtia, to L.G. Durno, District Magistrate, Nadia, 13 March 1927, GB Pol. File 140/27, WBSA.

<sup>22</sup>GB Press Communiqué, 19 Jan. 1927, GB Pol. File 500/26, WBSA.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid

In retaliation the Muhammadans at Baqr-Id deliberately sacrificed a cow in the open without making any attempt to screen the ceremony. The Hindus promptly took out a procession at the time of the evening prayer.

The leading organizer on the Hindu side in Patuakhali was Satindranath Sen. A former Jugantar activist, he had participated in the Non-cooperation Movement and had risen to fame by organizing the highly successful Union Board Boycott movement among the overwhelmingly Muslim population in the Laukati Union in Bakarganj. By 1924, he was the principal figure in the Congress organization in Barisal. With the local dispute in Patuakhali simmering, Satindranath decided to organize a *sankirtan* procession past the mosque every day, thus defying prohibitory orders. The courting of arrest continued daily for the next four months. 'Resentment and agitation were also brewing among the Muslim peasantry in the countryside, stirred up by the new propagandists who were calling for the abandonment of certain practices, such as attending the *tamashas* attached to some of the Hindu festivals, objections to paying certain exactions of Hindu landlords, whereby the expenses of such festivals are met.'<sup>24</sup>

The fuse blew in March 1927 on the occasion of Saraswati Puja. The District Magistrate had permitted a procession with music at Perozpur, upon which several local Muslim leaders called for a hartal on the day of the puja. Following the hartal, it was alleged, local leaders and particularly Maulvi Shahduddin, 'an outside agitator', 'induced large mobs of Muhammadans armed with lathis to assemble and prevent by force Hindu processions'.<sup>25</sup> There was a riot at Ponabalia and Kulkati, and to restore order the police fired, killing 15 people, all Muslims.

We must note four points from the evidence on Patuakhali, for they will serve as useful points of comparison with the data from other areas. Firstly, there is the question of propaganda among the Muslim peasantry for the purification of religious practices. Secondly, there is organized Hindu agitation on the issue of 'civil rights' involving leading personalities in both the Congress organization and the Hindu Mahasabha. This agitation is conducted in the urban areas of the district and is patronized by local Hindu

<sup>24</sup>Report by E.N. Blandy, District Magistrate, Bakarganj, 7 Dec. 1926, GB Pol. File 500/26, WBSA.

<sup>25</sup>GB to G.I. Home, 5 April 1927, G.I. Home Pol. File 11/IX/27, NAI.

zamindars, professionals and merchants. To this there is organized Muslim opposition in the form of a hartal. Thirdly, open violence occurs in the countryside where Muslim peasants outnumber Hindus. Fourthly, when the state intervenes, its actions are judged in terms of whether the officers concerned are Hindu or European,<sup>26</sup> and once the shooting incident takes place, all Muslim opinion in Bengal condemns the government for being anti-Muslim.<sup>27</sup>

In the jute-growing districts of north and north-eastern Bengal, on the other hand, it was the commercial activities of jute traders and money-lenders which occupied the most crucial position in the lives of the peasantry. It was an activity which peasants regarded with considerable distrust and resentment, for they did not understand the unpredictable price fluctuations in the market for raw jute which always seemed to work against them, and following the jute slump of the early 1920s their grudge found open expression. The local literature of the period, mainly written in verse suitable for recitation or singing, shows much greater anger against traders and money-lenders than against zamindars.

<sup>26</sup>Hemayetuddin Ahmed, Chairman of the District Board, wrote a string of letters to senior officials in Calcutta and to prominent Muslim leaders in the city, alleging that 'the constables, being up-country Hindus, have sympathy with the Sankirtan party and do not act loyally', and pleading for 'an European administration in place of a Hindu Raj'. Hemayetuddin Ahmed to Nawab Ali Chaudhuri, Member, Executive Council, 7 Sept. 1926. 'The DM is a Hindu, so is the Additional . . . We need a strong European District Officer here just at present and an European additional'. Hemayetuddin Ahmed to Sir Abdur Rahim, 7 Sept. 1926, GB Pol. File 500/26, WBSA. For further details on this point, see Partha Chatterjee, 'Some Considerations on the Making of the Tenancy Act Amendment 1928', *op. cit.*

<sup>27</sup>The firing caused a furore in political circles in Bengal and virtually every Muslim leader condemned the government. To some extent this reaction was influenced by the fact that there was already much factionally inspired opposition to the Ghuznavi-Chakravarti ministry then in office. But the tone of organized opinion was much more strident than would be warranted by mere factional considerations. The *Soltan* of Maniruzzaman Islam-badi said: '. . . it is easily proved how small is the value of Muslim life in the eyes of the *ma-hap* government of the country . . . This *Karbala* enacted at Ponabalia by the British Government to uphold the improper obstinacy of the Hindu community is perhaps without a parallel on earth except Jallianwalla Bagh in the Punjab.' *Soltan*, 9 March 1927. A few days later, it again stated: 'Blood for blood is the rule of justice and the provision of nature . . . Hence we ask the Governor of Bengal and the Governor-General of India to-day, what is the exchange for the blood of the inoffensive and innocent sons of Barisal? . . . Hence we ask Bengal Moslems, will you wait, depending on the award of the British Government? Have you no duties to-day regarding the provision of punishment for Mr Blandy, the Barisal representative of the British Government?' Abul Mozaffar, 'Blood for Blood', *Soltan*, 14 March 1927; translation in GB Pol. File 134/27, WBSA. Fazlul Huq announced in Barisal: 'We have nothing to fear. To save Islam we will walk over not one but a hundred Blandys and face a hundred thousand bullets . . . Until Blandy is absolved of the charge against him,

My dear unlettered peasant brethren of Bengal! Do you remember when you had sold your jute, and aping the ways of the rich had covered your roofs with tin, had spent five hundred rupees even after paying *nazar salami* to the landlord in order to dig a pond? Hadn't you hoped to grow more jute the next year and so borrowed money to spend on the wedding of your son, on fireworks to greet the new bride? And today most of the you are on your way toward the jungles of Assam. . . .<sup>28</sup>

When jute came to this country,  
The *paschima* [one from the west—Marwari] conquered us. . . .  
Now, look, they have all the money.  
They do not look after the interest of Bengalis.  
Those who could not get to eat even *chhatu*  
Now eat *balam* rice: just think of it!  
And Bengalis do not get Rangoon rice!  
And Bengalis are a dumb race.  
The *paschima* finds a place here,  
Nowhere else would he find a place.<sup>29</sup>

The Marwaris own lakhs, and you till and starve,  
Their eyes glitter as they loot the wealth of Bengal. . . .  
In a few days the Marwaris will have all,  
And you will be left with nothing but your debts.  
You will see in a few days everything will go to the Marwari,  
And there will be nothing you can do: Abed knows this for sure.<sup>30</sup>

Look, other *jatis* [people] do business and loot our money.  
It is because of their business that they are the lords and we paupers.<sup>31</sup>

More articulate analysts described the process as follows:

The principal reason why the peasants of Bengal are today facing complete ruin is the terrible oppression of the usurious *mahajan* of Bengal. . . . On the one hand, the usurious *mahajan*, and on the other, the mighty landlords—the combined pressure of these two powerful classes have broken the back of the innocent and simple peasantry of Bengal. The fear of oppression has already forced nearly twenty-five per cent of the peasants of Bengal to leave their beloved land of birth

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we will treat him like a dog, even worse than a dog, and I will write his name on the walls of my lavatory and strike it with a broomstick three times a day.' S.C. Taylor, Superintendent of Police, Barisal, to F.J. Lowman, DIG, IB, 7 March 1927, G.I. Home Pol. File 11/IX/27, NAI.

<sup>28</sup>A.F.M. Abdul Hai, *Adarsha-Krishak* (Mymensingh, 1921), p. 32.

<sup>29</sup>Abdul Sarfud Mian, *Knshak Boka* (Shara, Mymensingh, 1921).

<sup>30</sup>Abed Ali Mian, *Palli-dasha* (Panatipara, Rangpur, 1925).

<sup>31</sup>Abdul Aziz, *Dunia O Akherat Do-Jahaner Najat* (Noakhali, 1925).



and the affection of their relatives and to run with their lives towards the dense forests of Assam.<sup>32</sup>

The threat of boycott by Hindu traders and the political disadvantage in which Muslims had been placed because of their inferiority in trade and business was another theme which recurs in the literature of the period.

If today our Hindu brethren stop their services as blacksmiths or potters,  
Think of what would happen to us.  
How would you subsist or cultivate?  
Remember further: always buy from a Musalman.  
When you buy from the shop of a *bijati* [one belonging to another religion],  
He would spend that money to worship his Shiva and Kali and Durga.  
For a saving of two or four pice, do not disregard Islam.<sup>33</sup>

The other aspect of Hindu domination which provoked considerable resentment among Muslim peasants was the oppression of petty zamindari officials.

. . . What we are witnessing is the beginning of the break-up of the social and economic supremacy of the Hindu higher castes. The Muhammadans realize that where mere numbers count they must necessarily be a power, . . . a particular grievance of which one often

<sup>32</sup>Shah Abdul Hamid, *Krishak-bilap* (Banduldia, Mymensingh, 1921), p. 3.

<sup>33</sup>Abdul Aziz, *op. cit.* A more rationalist school among educated Muslims in Bengal at this time, in fact, advocated the repeal of the traditional Islamic injunctions against usury. 'Muslim society must be saved from this burden of debt. My opinion on this matter is that we are getting poorer everyday for having to pay interest. Yet for various activities it is impossible to do without loans; in these circumstances the respected Maulavis and Maulanas must consider whether it is possible to think of any special procedures regarding the injunction against usurious activity.' Abdus Sattar, Presidential Address at the Chittagong Islamia District Conference, 1925. This strand of opinion was to find influential support among the provincial Muslim political leaders, most notably from Akram Khan. On the other hand, there were rationalist supporters as well of the traditional injunctions on grounds of anti-capitalism. 'Many among Muslims today argue against the injunction on usury. They are overwhelmed by the wealth and splendour of the modern world . . . But in truth modern trade and industry has had a most disastrous effect on the common people; it has struck at the roots of true brotherhood. Why do we see today the rise of socialism, communism, syndicalism? . . . When Bolshevism was established in Russia after overthrowing the old regime, its first programme was the abolition of usury. We see today in every socialist programme the proposal to abolish capital and profit . . . Trade is not forbidden in the *shariat*, but usury is. The trade which is permitted in the Koran is quite unlike the predatory trade for profit practised in the modern world most of which would come under the Islamic concept of usury . . .' Abul Hussain, *Muslim 'Culture'* (Dacca, 1928), pp. 36-7.

hears is the refusal of most Hindu landlords and their *amla* to allow even well-to-do Muhammadan tenants the courtesy of a seat.<sup>34</sup>

The rustic poet expressed his feelings as follows :

I think in my mind of the great zamindar  
 Who does not recite the name of Allah even once in a month.  
 The *raja*, the zamindar and all their *amla*  
 Suck the *praja* like jackals and dogs.  
 The way the *amla* oppress the *praja*  
 The *raja* does not open his eyes and see even once . . .  
 They do not fear death.  
 When the *raja* dies and leaves this world,  
 Where will his kingdom be? his sons? his family?  
 When you close your eyes and leave, there's no one near you. . .  
 Would you still have your quilt, your mattress, you carpets and covers ?  
 You will go to your grave wearing only a white shroud.  
 You will lie in your grave and see darkness all around you.  
 Never again will you open your eyes and see the gaslights. . . .<sup>35</sup>

This entire complex of feelings against feudal authority and commercial exploitation, transformed ideologically into political action against the enemies of a peasant community united by religion, found expression in the Pabna riots of 1926. Here too there were 'itinerant maulvis' who, it was reported in official documents, had been brought into the arena of organized mass politics by the Khilafat-Noncooperation Movement, and who had campaigned to purify Islamic practices among the peasantry. The chief point of the campaign was an appeal to Muslims not to participate in Hindu religious festivals and to insist on the prohibition of music before mosques. But on this occasion in Pabna, it was alleged that these *maulvis* had gone even further and had provoked people to interfere with the immersion of a Durga image and to desecrate Kali images in Kajuri, Kankia, Shibpur and Ekdanta,<sup>36</sup> and the Government of Bengal reported that 'in the latter part of April and in May the cases of surreptitious desecration of more or less abandoned idols were more frequent in Pabna than in almost

<sup>34</sup>District Magistrate, Mymensingh, quoted in A.N. Moberly, Chief Sec. GB, to H.G. Haig, Home Sec. G.I., 4 Nov. 1926, GB Pol. File 516/26, WBSA.

<sup>35</sup>Abbas Ali Nazir, *Kalir Fakirer Khela O Alimganer Nasihat* (Dacca, 1920).

<sup>36</sup>Petition of Radhica Bhusan Ray (Zamindar, Tarash), Jnanada Govindo Chowdhury (Zamindar, Tantibond) and others to H.L. Stephenson, Acting Gov., 18 Sept. 1926, GB Pol. File 317/26, WBSA.

any other district in East Bengal'.<sup>37</sup> Indeed the series of clashes in Pabna in July 1926 began when it was reported that 'some idols of Pabna town had been removed overnight from their places of resting and left in mutilated condition on the public road near the Sitlai zamindar's house'<sup>38</sup>—an act which the Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division thought had been committed 'by some Muhammadan bad characters'.<sup>39</sup> In response, the leading Hindu gentry of Pabna town held a 'secret meeting' in the house of Jogendra Nath Maitra, zamindar of Sitlai, 'at which they decided to have the procession with music past mosques in the town at the time of evening prayer'; intelligence sources also reported that 'they had collected and kept concealed lathis, etc., in Hindu shops near mosques'.<sup>40</sup> The procession was taken out that evening and there was a clash before a mosque in Khalifapatti.

In the next ten to twelve days the disturbances spread to the countryside and the chief targets were Hindu, particularly Marwari, shops in the village *hats* of Pabna, Atgharia, Sujanagar and Santhia *thana* areas.<sup>41</sup> A case was reported of the looting of the house of a big Hindu *jotdar* near Pabna by his Muslim tenants.<sup>42</sup> A few days later, the Commissioner of Rajshahi, touring the disturbed areas, saw much evidence of mob violence on the small Hindu minority in the villages around Pabna: in Char Tarapur, a large village, 'the whole Hindu population (said to consist of some 50 families) congregated on the roof of a large two-storied house belonging to the leading Hindu of the village who was also the president of the panchayat . . . It was clear that he was too afraid of reprisals to give names [of the looters] . . .'<sup>43</sup> Later the Commissioner sent in a more detailed report on the agitators in the countryside: 'From the information at present available, it seems likely that there is an organized nucleus of possibly some hundreds

<sup>37</sup>A.N. Moberly, Chief Sec. GB, to Home Sec. G.I., 17 Aug. 1926, GB Pol. File 317/26, WBSA.

<sup>38</sup>N. Ahmad, District Magistrate, Pabna, 'Report on the Pabna Disturbances', 24 July 1926, GB Pol. File 317/26, WBSA.

<sup>39</sup>W.A. Marr, Commnr, Rajshahi Division, to A. N. Moberly, 25 July 1926, GB Pol. File 317/26, WBSA.

<sup>40</sup>Report on Case No. 15/26 by T. Meerza, Superintendent of Police, Pabna, 2 July 1926, GB Pol. File 317/26, WBSA.

<sup>41</sup>Telegram from Commnr., Rajshahi Division, to GB Pol., 7 July 1926; N. Ahmad, 'Report on the Pabna Disturbances', GB Pol. File 317/26, WBSA.

<sup>42</sup>Marr to Moberly, 6 July 1926, GB Pol. File 317/26, WBSA.

<sup>43</sup>Marr to Moberly, 9 July 1926, GB Pol. File 317/26, WBSA.

of Muhammadans who have come largely from the *char* areas on both sides of the Ganges and who, after looting a house or shop, disperse into the neighbouring villages where they find food and shelter from their fellow Muhammadans and stir them up with tales of desecration of mosques and then with their aid attack some other villages. They have spies and skirmishers to watch for the arrival of any police force, when they again disperse and are sheltered by their co-religionists.<sup>44</sup>

In Pabna, too, we see the same pattern: Hindu strength organized in the towns and led by zamindars and professionals, Muslim retaliation in the countryside. However, what emerges even more emphatically from this evidence are, first of all, the deliberate and often surreptitious attempts to mutilate idols; secondly, the prominence of centres of commercial activity such as *hats* and shops as targets of attack; and thirdly, the quick spread and virtually spontaneous nature of violent actions in the countryside, with a core group of agitators moving from village to village: the impression produced by this part of the evidence is that of a jacquerie. The idol-breaking incidents are significant, because in the ideological world of religious symbolisms where notions of authority and political ethics are coded and legitimized in religious terms, idol-breaking with all its overtones of mischievousness and criminality undoubtedly constituted a conscious act of defiance against *feudal* authority. The looting of shops and markets are, of course, easier to understand. Indeed, the campaigns of Islamic purification, the effects of the Khilafat-Non-cooperation Movement, the economic crisis, the slump in jute prices, all added up to a conjuncture in which the peasantry of north and eastern Bengal was prepared to act against those it perceived as its oppressors. Relatively spontaneous collective action occurred where the collectivity was culturally and ideologically united, and where the enemies were distinct and easily identifiable.

The widespread disturbances in the Kishoreganj subdivision of Mymensingh district in 1930 were much along the same lines. The targets here were mainly money-lenders.

The trouble began apparently during the last Mohurrum when the then Naib of the Atharabari Zemindari Kacheri at Hossainpur interfered with the usual processions and gave the local Muhammadans great offence. On Sunday the 7th July, a big Muhammadan meeting

<sup>44</sup>Marr to Moberly, 10 July 1926, GB Pol. File 317/26, WBSA.

was held at Hossainpur at which the Naib and all his works (including, besides the above, the alleged oppression of Muhammadan tenants and active support of the Congress Party) were denounced and resolutions were passed against the payment of interest to money-lenders.<sup>45</sup>

The usual procedure was for a mob of anything from 100 to 1000 men to demand back from money-lenders all the documents in his possession. If he said that the documents were not with him, he was told to have them ready by a certain time, and his house was looted, and in some cases burnt, if he did not produce the documents at the time fixed.<sup>46</sup>

In all about ninety villages were affected. There were several cases of police firing and 631 persons ('only principal culprits') were finally sent up for trial. The villages where the incidents took place lay 'sufficiently far apart to indicate that at least three separate groups were operating and that the motives and beliefs actuating the looters were more or less general.'<sup>47</sup>

About the motives, the District Magistrate was categorical:

I am of opinion that the disturbances are fundamentally economic and many Hindu pleaders and others with whom I have discussed the matter agree with this view. Last year was a bad one for jute cultivation, and it is feared that this year will be as bad, if not worse, because the crop is likely to be a bumper one over an increased area, while the demand from the mills will be diminished on account of short-time working. The present price of about Rs 5/8 a maund is hardly sufficient to cover expenses.<sup>48</sup>

There were, he said, Muslim religious leaders who were goading on the peasantry to act against the money-lenders. But, he added significantly:

This does not mean that the Kishoreganj disturbances have been communal. They were primarily economic with a necessary communal tinge because more than 90 per cent of the tenants and debtors in the affected areas are Muhammadans, while the large majority of the money-lenders are Hindus. Muhammadan money-lenders have, however, been proportionately threatened and looted. ... It is also significant that, so far as I have been able to ascertain, there has not been a single instance of looting or threatening demands from any one except money-lenders, and that no attempt has been made to molest Hindus as Hindus.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>45</sup>L.B. Burrows, District Magistrate, Mymensingh, to W.S. Hopkyns, Chief Sec., 18 July 1926, GB Pol. File 613/30, WBSA.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*

All reported instances of attacks on money-lenders, however, involved Hindus. Besides, the fact that the central issue was money-lending is significant, for Muslim *mahajans* were in any case guilty of violating the Koranic injunction against usury. Some other bits of evidence are also illuminating. All raids on the houses or shops of money-lenders were carried out during the day: it was said that the raiders 'think that to go out at night is thieving which is against the shariat, but it is a brave and laudable action to commit loot and plunder at day time'.<sup>50</sup> A petition to the Governor from leading Hindu professionals of Kishoreganj alleged that the 'ruffians', although armed, 'entered the houses of Hindus and possessed themselves of holy Khargos reserved for sacrificing animals, on special festivals. They held up several of these deadly weapons over the heads of the principal house-holders, until bonds, ornaments and cash were forthcoming in abundance.'<sup>51</sup>

It is hardly surprising to discover that the ideology which shaped and gave meaning to the various collective acts of the peasantry was fundamentally *religious*. The very nature of peasant consciousness, the apparently consistent unification of an entire set of beliefs about nature and about men in the collective and active mind of a peasantry, is religious. Religion to such a community provides an ontology, an epistemology as well as a practical code of ethics, including political ethics. When this community acts politically, the symbolic meaning of particular acts—their signification—must be found in religious terms. Whatever scattered bits of evidence we have about collective political action by the peasantry in eastern and northern Bengal, all go to show this. There is, of course, a basis to this in social structure—in this particular case, the relatively undifferentiated character of the peasantry in eastern Bengal. The relevant evidences on this particular aspect of regional variations in the agrarian structure of Bengal have been discussed elsewhere;<sup>52</sup> it only needs to be

<sup>50</sup>Letter from Satish Chandra Roy Chaudhuri, 17 July 1930, GB Pol. File 613/30, WBSA.

<sup>51</sup>Petition by 58 persons of Kishoreganj to the Governor of Bengal, GB Pol. File 613/30, WBSA. Besides, there were certain specific considerations which prompted the Government to play down the communal angle: the District Magistrate, for instance, argued against punitive taxes or the posting of additional police since 'this would give the proceedings a communal colour which the Hindus would certainly crow over and might also utilize to persuade the Muhammadans from their present opposition to the Civil Disobedience Movement.' Burrows to Hopkyns, 18 July 1930, GB Pol. File 613/30, WBSA.

<sup>52</sup>Partha Chatterjee, 'Agrarian Structure in Pre-Partition Bengal' in Asok Sen, Partha Chatterjee and Saugata Mukherji, *Three Studies on Agrarian Structure in Bengal, 1850-1947* (forthcoming)

mentioned here that the processes of differentiation within the peasantry were far more advanced in the districts of western and south-western Bengal than in the east. As a consequence, there were differences in the nature of political movements among the peasantry in the two regions: in Midnapore or Hooghly or Burdwan or Bankura, while there are moments when the peasant community is found to act as a collectivity, the tendency or process of change is clearly towards the accentuation of perceived class differences within the peasantry, and towards the growth of movements on class demands directed against sections that were previously considered part of the community.<sup>53</sup> There then begins to be created a new set of symbols with new political meanings, perhaps a new way of looking at society and social relationships. It is this process of tension between the continued ideological relevance and political resilience of the notion of the peasant community, on the one hand, and the new perceptions of class differences within the peasantry, on the other, that forms the stuff of peasant politics in the colonial period, or more generally in the period of pre-capitalist societies in transition.

There is still another aspect of the peasant-communal ideology on which the Kishoreganj evidence is revealing. This concerns the way in which the formally organized state machinery appears in peasant consciousness. To start with, the state is always distant, an entity with which relations are bound by certain norms of reciprocity, where obedience is contingent upon fulfilment of the requirements of justice, but an entity which is not organic or integral to the familiar sphere of everyday social activity. It is capricious; benevolent one moment, tyrannical the next. It is recognized by its functionaries who deal with the peasantry on its behalf. When action needs to be taken against the state, it is the functionaries who become targets. During the Civil Disobedience movement in Mymensingh town, the police had forcibly broken through a cordon of Congress volunteers picketing the excise warehouse, and several volunteers were injured. At this the crowd

<sup>53</sup>See the various articles on peasant movements and nationalism in the districts of south-western Bengal by Hitesranjan Sanyal: 'Dakshinpaschim Banglay Jatiatabadi Andolan', *Chaturanga*, 38 (1976), 1, pp. 1-26; 38 (1976), 3, pp. 183-207; 39 (1977), 1, pp. 68-83. 'Congress Movement in the Villages of Eastern Midnapore, 1921-1931', *Asie du Sud: Traditions et Changements* (Paris, 1979), pp. 169-78. 'Arambagher Jatiatabadi Andolan', *Anyar Artha*, 6 (Sept.-Oct. 1974), pp. 6-23; 7 (Nov.-Dec. 1974), pp. 1-15. 'Bankura Jelay Jatiatabadi Andolan', *Anyar Artha*, 10 (Jan.-Feb. 1977), pp. 1-21.

of onlookers became enraged and attacked the police party, upon which the police fired to disperse the crowd. A little later, a constable of the local police-station, uniformed and riding on a cycle and not in any way involved in the earlier incident, was attacked on a street some distance from the warehouse by a large crowd of angry people and beaten to death.<sup>54</sup> During the Patuakhali satyagraha, Muslim leaders felt that the impartiality of the Government was suspect because it was manned by Hindu officials; after the Kulkati firing, Muslim opinion was bitterly against the Government. In 1930, however, during the Civil Disobedience movement and soon after the raid on the armoury in Chittagong, when communal riots occurred in Dacca, it was widely alleged that government officials and the police had actively connived with Muslims in order to strike back at the Hindu *bhadralok*. Numerous statements were made before the Adami Committee set up to investigate the riots, alleging that senior police officials as well as constables actually aided crowds of Muslims raiders in attacking and looting Hindu houses and shops, or at best stood aside. It was said that when the police was approached for protection, senior European officers replied, 'Why, take Swaraj, babu, *swaraj leo!*'<sup>55</sup> The Superintendent of Police was reported to have said, 'You want Congress, and to make hartal and picketing. Now feel the consequences. Go to the Congress and ask for help. Do you want British Raj or Congress Raj?'<sup>56</sup> Muslims who participated in the raids apparently believed that 'the Nawab Sahib of Dacca had become the lord of thirteen districts and it was ordered by him that no person would be arrested or convicted if Hindu houses were looted and burnt in those thirteen districts for seven days.'<sup>57</sup>

In Kishoreganj too, 'Maulvis and others from Bhowal and Dacca have appeared and told the ignorant cultivators that Government is on the side of the Muhammadans and will not interfere if they demand back their bonds and other documents from money-lenders and extort them forcibly if necessary'.<sup>58</sup> At

<sup>54</sup>GB Pol. File 435/30, WBSA.

<sup>55</sup>Statements of Madan Mohan Basak and Baikuntha Kumar Ray Choudhury, GB Pol. File 444/30, WBSA.

<sup>56</sup>Statement of Protap Chandra Saha, GB Pol. File 444/30, WBSA.

<sup>57</sup>Statements of Satish Chandra Bagchi and Protap Chandra Saha, GB Pol. File 444/30, WBSA.

<sup>58</sup>Burrows to Hopkyns, 18 July 1930, GB Pol. File 613/30, WBSA.



several places, the looters were heard to have cried that 'Government had given Swaraj to them for the space of fifteen days'.<sup>59</sup> When the Circle Officer arrived at a scene of looting in Pakundia, 'he was asked why he had come to interfere when the authorities had done nothing of the kind at Dacca'. The District Magistrate visited a village in Hossainpur and found it practically empty; he was told that 'the villagers had all gone south to demand back their deeds from mahajans . . . everybody said this was the Government order promulgated about ten days previously.' A rioter wounded by police firing called out before he died, '*Ami British Governmenter praja, dohai British Government*' (I am a subject of the British Government, have mercy on me) and 'could not evidently understand why he had been shot'.<sup>60</sup>

#### IV

There are numerous instances in Indian history, recent and not so recent, of peasant communities acting autonomously against the formally organized state, that is, against its agents or functionaries. But because of its perceptual distance from the world of everyday living of the members of the community, the state conceived as an external oppressive force also becomes the most convenient issue for organized mobilization of the peasantry. This is probably the most common sort of programme on which organized political groups such as parties attempt to mobilize support among the peasantry: from registering a protest or seeking justice through a rally or *dharna* or satyagraha or rebellion to changing the *sarkar* by voting in an election or rising in arms. Perhaps, this is true in a country like India where, for most parts of the country, the formal state machinery has since early medieval times been organized more or less as a centralized imperial bureaucracy; the same perception regarding the state might not exist in places or periods where a formal state machinery is indistinguishable from local feudalism. The language of organized politics often characterizes such forms of mobilization as an alliance of various classes or strata within the peasantry, but ideologically the notion of the alliance is hardly ever relevant in collective actions of this kind; it is always the concept of the community as a collective whole, a form of authority incapable of

<sup>59</sup>Report by G.K. Ghosh Chowdhury, SDO, South Sadar, Mymensingh, GB Pol. File 613/30, WBSA.

<sup>60</sup>Burrows to Hopkyns, 18 July 1930, GB Pol. File 613/30, WBSA.

being broken down into constituent parts, which shapes and directs peasant politics *vis-à-vis* the state. The perceptual distance of the state—the absence of organic links with the everyday world of peasant life—also provides the analytical ground for explaining the sudden and unanticipated swings in popular opinion about the *sarkar*. Indeed, it is precisely this perceptual distance which, when favourable structural conditions prevail in the organized world of struggle between sections of the ruling classes, creates room for the manipulative operations of populist politics and charismatic politicians.

The variations in the institutional form of what we have called the feudal mode of state power, i.e. centralized bureaucracy or virtually sovereign feudal lords, are important in analysing the ideologies or types of political movements among the peasantry in different countries or situations. In the Indian case, for instance, the question of peasant movements against feudal or semi-feudal exploitation is much more problematical than actions against the bureaucratic state apparatus. The former is enmeshed in a host of relationships of mutual obligation, institutionalized in a wide variety of customary practices, and validated in specific ways in specific cultural contexts. There can rarely be a straight correspondence between the distinctly economic role of a feudal or semi-feudal landlord, especially in a period of structural change in the agrarian economy, and the perception of his role in the established culture or social ideology of the community. But there are in each specific case recognized symbols of feudal authority: rituals and customs concerning, in most instances, feudal right and property—their legitimation and display—and the superiority of physical force which is the final basis of feudal power, demonstrated in the right to punish any act of disobedience. Correspondingly, a revolt against feudal authority involves acts of conscious violation of these symbols of authority—loot and destruction of property and desecration of objects of ritual significance.

But whatever the variations in the specific social constitution of a peasant community, and hence of the specific set of cultural symbols and beliefs surrounding the relations of the community with feudal or bureaucratic state authority, when a community acts collectively the fundamental political characteristics are the same everywhere. Whether it is the peasantry of Contai in

Midnapore engaged in collective violation of the Salt Act, or of Chechuahat in the Ghatal subdivision of the same district pursuing and repeatedly attacking a police contingent sent in to break up a satyagraha, or of Pabna looting and setting fire to shops and markets, all reveal the same political phenomenon at work. It is *the nature of the linkage of peasant-communal politics of this kind with the structure of organized politics* which designates one movement as 'Gandhian', the other 'terrorist' and still another 'communalist'. In other words, the analytical problems of studying peasant movements in the modern period (and those of identifying elements of continuity with peasant movements of earlier periods) are to a considerable extent resolved if one distinguishes between the two kinds of politics: the categories of parties, factions, leaders, etc. which emerge in the analysis of organized politics do not apply to communal politics, they apply only to the linkages between the two.

Of course, even after granting a relative autonomy to the sphere of peasant-communal politics, its linkages with organized parties or factions or movements will not turn out to be entirely a matter of chance. There will be identifiable patterns. These patterns are to a considerable extent determined by the nature of oppositions in the world of organized politics—the specific structure of interests and organizations obtaining in a particular conjuncture. But they are also influenced by the actions of peasant communities. Organized political groups seeking support among peasant communities are invariably led to turn and fashion their programmes so as to make them acceptable to the peasantry. While concepts and slogans of the world of organized politics undergo an ideological transformation when they reach the peasant masses and acquire entirely new meanings, so are the language, styles, symbols and processes of organized politics influenced by its linkages with the world of peasant-communal politics. Indeed, the natures of these linkages, while they are not entirely patternless, are nonetheless not wholly predictable either, for they provide the room for political leadership—organizational ability, imagination, the skilful application of the 'art' of politics.

However, it is also a very significant feature of peasant-communal politics in the modern period that their linkages with what we have called the world of organized politics occur to a large extent within a process of differentiation among the

peasantry, i.e. a process of the break-down of peasant communities. Differentiation has several political consequences. In the first place, in the general situation of agricultural stagnation within which differentiation usually occurs in colonial countries, it is accompanied by a much more frequent incidence of scarcity conditions—bad harvests, droughts, famines: it is only in the long run that the few improve their position while the many lose out. These usually are conditions in which peasant communities act against the state and other 'outside' exploiters. Secondly, when under such conditions, communities act collectively as communities, there is often a correspondence between the natural organic leadership of the community and those who rise from amongst the peasantry to economically superior positions. The exact process in which this occurs in various situations needs to be examined in greater detail: *a priori*, several possibilities can be thought of. Thirdly, it is this upper stratum which rises in the course of differentiation—a superior peasantry or a new class of semi-feudal landlords—and which, after a phase of peasant movements linked in one way or the other with organized politics, becomes the agent of mobilization, i.e. is incorporated into the formal structure of political organizations. Of course, the nature and extent of such incorporation depend to a large extent on the political process—its forms, mechanisms, adaptability and resilience. But the point which is crucial here is the inadequacy of the peasant-communal ideology to provide an adequate perceptual guide for the identification of friends and enemies in a situation of rapid agrarian change: the peasant-communal ideology is incapable of identifying 'inside' exploiters or identifying the linkages between the 'external' bureaucratic state apparatus and its agents within the putative community. Such awareness can only be provided by alternative ideological systems, brought to the peasantry from outside, from the organized world of politics. But such ideological systems are built upon altogether different premises—the centrality of the individual, the collective as the aggregation of individuals, sectional interests, alliances between sectional interests, etc. In their theoretical basis, these alternative conceptions of politics are quite alien to the peasant-communal ideology. A complete absorption of the former into peasant consciousness would in effect mean the extinction of the latter.

But rarely has there occurred a complete replacement of the

peasant-communal ideology in societies which still remain largely agrarian. Ideologically, the notion of the community is surprisingly resilient. What often happens under the pressure of differentiation and the influence of political ideas and forms of organization brought from outside is a fragmentation of the original idea of the community, an imposition of older cultural symbols of communal identity on a truncated collectivity, such as, for instance, a caste, or a group of artisans, or even a specific stratum of the peasantry. Processes of organized mobilization would then aggregate these truncated communal units into larger political movements.

It is this last process which is seen in operation in the vast bulk of the material on peasant politics in colonial and post-colonial agrarian societies. Much further work needs to be done on this material before definite patterns can be identified and the process described with greater precision. The task of the present essay has merely been to suggest an analytical framework to distinguish meaningfully between the various kinds of politics which remain entangled in the state formations and political processes of large agrarian countries in the modern period. Using this framework, the essay has analysed some material from Bengal's politics in a period when the process of differentiation among the peasantry was still in an embryonic stage in the districts of eastern Bengal. The autonomous identity of the peasant-communal ideology, the actions against the state and against feudal and commercial exploitation and the nature of linkages with organized politics have been established. What happens once the process of differentiation becomes rapid after the depression of the early 1930s, how the peasant communities become available for mobilization by various rival factions of the Muslim provincial leadership, how the peasantry by its actions turns the course of developments in the world of organized politics, must all await discussion on another occasion.

# Small Peasant Commodity Production and Rural Indebtedness: the Culture of Sugarcane in Eastern U.P., c. 1880-1920

SHAHID AMIN

'In a world where seasons are uncertain and six months elapse between sowing and harvest, the need for advances was not the intention of man; it was inherent in the nature of things.'

--R.H. Tawney, 'Introduction' to Thomas Wilson, *A Discourse Upon Usury by way of dialogue and orations, for the better variety and more delight of all those that shall read this treatise* [1572], London, 1925, p. 19

It is generally agreed that towards the end of the last century an intensification of commodity production took place in the Indian countryside. The character, direction and regional variations of this process have however been the subject of much debate and polemic. It seems that in certain regions, like Meerut (U.P.), the canal colonies of the Punjab, 'wet' deltaic regions of South India, plains Gujarat and Bombay Karnatak, rich peasants did gain considerably from sugar, cotton and tobacco cultivation.<sup>1</sup> However, despite the valiant jats who have adorned the narratives of peasants under the Raj, the problem of small peasant commodity production remains an important one for vast areas of the country.

Various frameworks have been proposed for studying the growth of commercial agriculture in India in the recent past. One such approach concentrates on the sums of money paid to the peasants for their produce, and orders its discourse around the notional or money value of cash crops. The peasantry is shown to be receptive to the pull of the market, and the rising curves of 'cash crop' prices, once set in motion in the late nineteenth century, are

<sup>1</sup>See Eric Stokes, *The Peasant and the Raj* (Cambridge, 1978), pp. 270 ff., for some useful references.

assumed to show a natural propensity of surmounting all hurdles and lining the pockets of even the humblest kisans. The obvious problem with this scenario is that it is unable to generate a sufficiently plausible explanation for the failure of smaller peasants to overcome their dependence even after a period of considerable involvement in commodity production.

The explanation for the widespread phenomenon of dependent agriculture is generally provided in terms of the power of the landlords and the money-lender-traders on the one hand and the seasonality and fragility of small peasant production on the other. Agriculture in India, it seems, is a kind of hot-house plant, unable to grow on its own without the crucial intervention of outside forces. However, in most writings on the subject there seems to be an amorphous disjunction between the *process* and the *relations* of small peasant production. While over the years a mass of information has been collected and frameworks used for analysing the relations between the peasants and the 'outside' world of markets, traders, landlords and the state, the actual process of production—the nitty-gritty of small peasant agriculture—has received cavalier or at best ambiguous consideration. Part of the explanation can be attributed to the limitations of our historical sources.<sup>2</sup> However, it seems more likely that the relative neglect of the process of production is related to the dominant methodologies that have informed recent studies of the peasantry in colonial India. Either the theoretical categories used are so general and abstract—viewing agricultural production as an appendage of the working of 'capital' on a world scale—that the domain of the 'peasant' is severely curtailed, without having been delineated in the first place. Or, where some specific features of small peasant production are apprehended, the exercise is generally conducted at an empirical level; the analysis being once again confined to the realm of the peasant and the 'outside' world: credit networks, local political domination, etc. Consequently, agricultural practices are either subsumed within the operations of 'monied capital', or retreat before the march of local and regional political and economic entities. Squashed between the heavy hammer of high theory and the dull slab of empirical presentation, the specificities

<sup>2</sup>Still, it seems that a good deal of the ethnographic material found in the district settlement reports and the writings of Buchanan, Grierson and Crooke remains to be tapped by historians.

of small peasant production fail to catch the eye of the historian.

If one turns to the village studies of the social anthropologists the picture is not very illuminating either. With the exception of Louis Dumont's monograph on South India and a group study of rice culture among the Mundas,<sup>3</sup> the spate of ethnographic studies seem to have very little room for the peasant producer. This post-war neglect is in curious contrast to the attention paid to peasant agriculture by the members of the Radhakamal Mukherjee school of sociology in U.P. and by Harold Mann and his associates in Western India in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>4</sup>

Our concern with these problems arises out of something more than a mere desire for an historical ethnography of the Indian peasantry. It is clear that a framework that emphasizes the role of the production process for an understanding of peasant agriculture forms a part of a wider exercise in writing subaltern history. At a more general level it stems from a view that predicates a discussion of the relations of men/women to each other on a prior investigation of their relationship to nature. In the case of colonial Indian agriculture such a viewpoint demands that more than just cursory attention be paid to the harvest and fiscal calendar of the peasantry, and to agricultural practices in their temporal sequence. As elsewhere, detailed manuals existed which regulated the work pattern of the peasantry in the various regions of India. A close study of these in conjunction with other relevant factors might suggest that the urgency of certain agricultural operations could have contributed materially to the discernible pattern of 'unequal exchange' between the peasantry and other social classes.

To give an example from the world of the peasantry itself: The season for harvesting of cane in eastern U.P. clashed with two other agricultural activities. The sugar mills in the early twentieth century for their part wanted a long cane-crushing season, spanning the period from mid-November to the end of April. This was

<sup>3</sup>Louis Dumont, *Une Sous-Caste de l'Inde du Sud: Organisation Sociale et Religion des Pramalai Kallar* (Paris, 1957), pp. 83 ff., especially, 'Le Calendrier Alimentaire', pp. 93-4. Cf. the rather neglected two-volume study of Munda agriculture conducted under an ambitious programme of 'Synthetic Research of the Culture of Rice Cultivating Peoples in Southeast Asian Countries'; Ryujii Yamada, *Cultural Formation of the Mundas* (Tokyo, 1970), especially, pp. 13-103, and Koichi Sugiyama, *A Study of the Munda Village Life* (Tokyo, 1969), pp. 11-21, 213-91.

<sup>4</sup>See, for instance, Radhakamal Mukherjee (ed.), *Fields and Farmers in Oudh* (London, 1929), pp. 46-68, 164-79, 234-42; Harold H. Mann, *Land and Labour in a Deccan Village* (London, 1917).



dictated by the necessity of reducing overhead costs, and to balance out on the sugar recovery, which for climatological reasons was low during winters and increased with the onset of the warm weather. The peasants, following the adage attributed to the month of *Magh* (January-February), were caught up in three agricultural activities. The standing cane crop had to be harvested, the fields had to be ploughed for the next year's sugarcane, and inferior winter grains had to be gathered. Unable to take time off from these pressing engagements, and incapable of using his meagre livestock both for carting cane to the mills and ploughing his fields, the small peasant sold his standing cane crop to the itinerant dealer. More often than not, he received a price much below the prevailing market rate. In most cases these itinerant dealers were rich peasants.<sup>5</sup> They could cope with all these conflicting activities at one point of time because they had a surplus of land, bullocks and carts, and were in a position to use hired labour on their own fields. It could be argued that they made trading profits because, unlike them, the smaller peasants who were following the same harvest calendar, could find sufficient time for the conflicting agricultural activities demanded of them at that particular moment of the agricultural year. Though it would not be entirely correct to suggest that one peasant's rigid adherence to 'peasant time' and 'natural work rhythm' here became another peasant's money, a connecting link is nevertheless discernible.

My purpose is not to multiply such examples but to argue for their integration into the problematic of peasant commodity production. In the first part of this essay I shall try to situate the notion of the 'process of production' in some of the recent discourses on colonial Indian agriculture. I shall then attempt an analysis of cane culture in eastern U.P. in terms of the specificities of small peasant production of the region. This would involve highlighting some aspects of peasant agriculture that have so far failed to qualify as building blocks for the recent theoretical constructs on the colonial Indian peasantry.

### *I Other Approaches*

A review of the existing literature on commercial agriculture in India must start with the writings of B. B. Chaudhuri on Bengal,

<sup>5</sup>Cf. *Report of the Committee Appointed to Inquire into the Working of the Co-operative Cane Supply Unions in the United Provinces* (Allahabad, 1947), p. 22; Sugarcane Inspector, Gorakhpur,

not only because he is the earliest practitioner in an otherwise crowded field, but also because of the wealth of his data and the wide scope of his investigations.<sup>6</sup> Central to Chaudhuri's analysis is a distinction between the old and the new credit agencies in the Bengal countryside. The traditional agency, represented by the local money-lenders, was interested in realizing a high interest rate from their transactions in grain and cash. As opposed to this, the new credit group, connected with trade and manufacturing organizations dealing in grain, sugar, indigo and jute, 'was primarily interested in a secure supply of a portion of the peasants' produce'.<sup>7</sup> With this distinction at hand Chaudhuri locates the relative importance of the 'new groups' in the production and marketing of various agricultural commodities—up and coming in rice, active in the important cane tracts in Darbhanga but relatively weak in the free and fluctuating market for raw jute in eastern Bengal.<sup>8</sup> Poppy and indigo were in a different league altogether; one was under the firm control of the government, and in the case of the other the planter's monopoly of the channels of credit also resulted in 'the entire produce being surrendered at a fixed price'.<sup>9</sup>

This distinction between usurious and mercantile capital and the differential integration of the various 'cash crops' with either of the two is an important addition to our knowledge. In other areas of commercial agriculture the functions of the 'banker', 'usurer' and the 'merchant' could very well be performed by the same agency—a reflection, as has been argued, of a relative underdevelopment of commodity production and a consequent absence of an elaborate distinction between the branches of capital and those of commerce.<sup>10</sup> However, what is perhaps more interesting is that often it is with an enlargement of markets for peasant produce that the boundaries between the 'old' and the 'new credit

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'General Note on the 1935-36 Cane Season' and letter to Collector, in Industries File 3 of 1935-6, Gorakhpur Record Room

<sup>6</sup>See Benoy Chowdhury, *Growth of Commercial Agriculture in Bengal, 1757-1900* (Calcutta, 1964), B. B. Chaudhuri, 'Growth of Commercial Agriculture in Bengal, 1859-1885', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 7:1&2 (March-June 1970) [Hereafter *IESHR*]

<sup>7</sup>*IESHR*, 7:2, (June 1970), p. 229.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 224-31

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 223.

<sup>10</sup>Jairus Banaji, 'Capitalist Domination and the Small Peasantry: Deccan Districts in the Late Nineteenth Century', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 13:33-4 (Aug. 1977), p. 1383.

agencies' get blurred and the roles conflated. Instances can be found of trading and manufacturing organizations securing their raw materials by dominating small peasant production through usurious and other 'traditional' dealings.<sup>11</sup> There seems a good case then for looking, as it were, for the weaker moments in small peasant agriculture, to locate the points of entry for trading organizations, old and new.

Here again Chaudhuri's initial probings have resulted in some important insights. Grain loans were necessitated in part by the need to pay hired labour for sowing, transplanting and harvesting winter rice at times when stocks had been depleted. As the largest instalment of rent coincided with the winter harvest, and as prices were lowest at that time, a greater quantity of grain had to be converted into cash than would have been otherwise necessary. 'A part of the grain loan was necessitated by the tendency of the prices of food-grains to rise from April-May onwards, which made it difficult for peasants to purchase them in the market, even if their cash fund had not completely run out.'<sup>12</sup> Zamindars were wont to bring rent-suits against the peasants around March, precisely when the latter's grain stocks had been nearly exhausted: cash had to be raised for the payment of rent dues. Indeed, 'the most important occasion for money loans was payment of rent'.<sup>13</sup> Clearly, any analysis of commercial agriculture would be the poorer if it did not take into account the above facets of small peasant production underlined by Chaudhuri for nineteenth-century Bengal.

Unfortunately, even when scholars succeeded in moving away from an exclusive preoccupation with tenurial history they did not often concern themselves directly with the problems that drew Chaudhuri's attention a decade ago. To digress briefly into the historiography of agriculture in colonial U.P., Sulekh Gupta and Imtiaz Hussain concentrated in the 1960s on 'landlords' and 'tenants' as legal categories created by British revenue policy in the early years of the nineteenth century, and Walter Neale highlighted the incomplete articulation of the two in an imperfectly developed market for land and tenurial rights for the whole

<sup>11</sup>Cf. S. Amin, 'From the Field to the Factory' The Instruments of Cane Procurement: A Case Study of Eastern U P Sugar Mills in the 1930s', in Marc Gaborieu and Alice Thorner (eds.), *Asie du Sud Traditions et Changements* (Paris, 1979), pp. 492-502.

<sup>12</sup>H.B. Chaudhuri, 'Rural Credit in Bengal, 1859-1885', *IESHR*, 6:3 (Sept. 1969), p. 225

<sup>13</sup>Loc. cit

span of colonial rule.<sup>14</sup> Concerned primarily with the intricacies of tenurial rights, these studies by and large ignored the actual conditions of agricultural production. Since then two general works on U.P. agriculture as it stood in the early and late nineteenth century respectively, have dealt *inter alia* with small peasant commodity production, and pointed out its links with the rigours of a monetized revenue demand and the complex web of rural indebtedness.<sup>15</sup> Analysing the effects of early nineteenth century revenue settlements, Asiya Siddiqi has commented that 'the subsistence element in [the peasant] economy was undermined and monetization was induced, not because [the peasant] had a surplus to exchange but because the necessity of paying his instalment of revenue forced him to sell even his food and stock'.<sup>16</sup> Siddiqi's own work, coupled with the recent writings of Chris Bayly, has highlighted the linkage of regional production of indigo, cotton and sugar to the overseas and a growing home market in the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>17</sup> However, the emphasis is squarely on distant markets and *mufassil hats* rather than on peasant production as such.

Basing herself on the voluminous records of the Revenue and Irrigation departments and utilizing the information contained in district settlement reports, Elizabeth Whitcombe has painted a rich picture of late nineteenth-century U.P. countryside. Her study contains a wealth of information on almost every aspect of country life, from the implements used by the peasants to the survey plans of the engineers working on the western and central U.P. canal systems. All the elements that go to constitute the specificities of small peasant agriculture—geo-ecology, the harvest calendar and its disjunction with the fiscal calendar of the state,

<sup>14</sup>S.C. Gupta, *Agrarian Relations and Early British Rule: A Case Study of Ceded and Conquered Provinces (Uttar Pradesh)* (Bombay, 1963); Imtiaz Hussain, *Land Revenue Policy in North India: The Ceded and Conquered Provinces* (Calcutta, 1967); W.C. Neale, *Economic Change in Rural India: Land and Reform in Uttar Pradesh, 1800-1955* (Yale, 1962). Attention must however be drawn to a rather different contemporary study by Gupta: S.C. Gupta and A. Majid, *Producers' Response to Changes in Prices and Marketing Policies: A Case Study of Sugarcane and Paddy in Eastern Uttar Pradesh* (Delhi, 1965).

<sup>15</sup>Asiya Siddiqi, *Agrarian Change in a Northern Indian State: Uttar Pradesh 1819-1833* (Oxford, 1973), pp. 132 ff.; Elizabeth Whitcombe, *Agrarian Conditions in Northern India, Vol. 1: The United Provinces Under British Rule, 1860-1900* (California, 1971), pp. 173-7.

<sup>16</sup>Siddiqi, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, chapter 6; C.A. Bayly, 'The Age of Hiatus: The North Indian Economy and Society, 1830-1850', in C.H. Phillips and M.D. Wainwright (eds.), *Indian Society and the Beginnings of Modernisation, c. 1830-1850* (London, 1976).

the vantage point that the peasant's need for ready cash afford to the usurer/trader—are present in this work, either in terms of the primary documentation or in Whitcombe's own inferences.<sup>18</sup> But despite its encyclopaedic proportions *Agrarian Conditions in Northern India* fails to generate a framework for analysing peasant commodity production in colonial U.P.

A similar lacuna is characteristic of Neil Charlesworth's study of western India in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. There is an awareness of the specificities of agricultural production in themselves contributing to the dependence of the small peasants on usurious traders, but the discussion of the 'agricultural time-table' somehow falls short of an adequate conceptualization of the process under observation. Charlesworth refers in passing to the uncertainties of the seasons and the consequent diversification this required in the crop regimes. He cites instances from mid-nineteenth-century Poona of the awkwardness of the revenue demand (falling before crops became marketable commodities) necessitating borrowings from the *mahajans*.<sup>19</sup> More interesting is his reproduction of the following contemporary observation about the urgency of certain agricultural operations exercising a considerable influence on the dependence of peasants on money-lenders:

[Throughout Poona district] the ploughing season commences as soon as the khurif crop is off the ground, and on this account the cultivator seldom gets the latter immediately ready for the market, but prefers raising from the sowkar the sum that he requires for the payment of the assessment.<sup>20</sup>

Charlesworth terminates his short discussion of the production process with the above quotation, maintaining rather blandly that 'most cultivators needed help before starting the season's operations'. The discussion then moves on to investigate the complementarity between the state and the *sowkar* as surplus appropriators and the distinguishing characteristics of rich and poor peasants.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup>Whitcombe, op. cit., pp. 21-31, 168-9, 155-60, 172-7, app. 2.

<sup>19</sup>Neil Charlesworth, 'Agrarian Society and British Administration in Western India, 1847-1920' (Cambridge Ph. D. Thesis, 1973), pp. 145-6, 153. Cf. the same author's, 'Rich Peasants and Poor Peasants in Late Nineteenth Century Maharashtra', in Clive Dewey and A.G. Hopkins (eds.), *The Imperial Impact: Studies in the Economic History of Africa and India* (London, 1978), pp. 97-113.

<sup>20</sup>Wingate Papers, Box 293/1, Diary for 10 May 1840, cited in Charlesworth, 'Agrarian Society', p. 153.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 154-60. Cf. 'Rich Peasants and Poor Peasants in Maharashtra'.

A relatively higher status is afforded to the peculiarities of small peasant agriculture in a recent study of South India. David Washbrook in his work on the 'dry' districts of the Madras presidency suggests that in the context of small holdings 'the mechanics of production were such that the independence of most small cultivators could only be nominal'. The small ryots could not afford to dig their own wells or maintain the heavy ploughs. Moreover, 'as revenue demand fell heaviest immediately after the harvest, they needed a market near at hand; they did not have the cash-flow to meet their commitments while holding their crop for storage and transportation'. The most important need however was for credit to enable them to tide over crop failures, replenish their stock and seed, and to indulge in 'occasional but lavish expenditure' on dowries and wedding feasts.<sup>22</sup> Continuance of production from one cycle to another was not possible in most cases without recourse to outside sources of finance and credit. Washbrook concludes his analysis of peasant production with the following observation: 'The fulcrum on which the crucial question of the economic independence of the average cultivator turned, was the nature and number of separate sources which could provide these necessities, particularly credit.'<sup>23</sup>

This seems a curious kind of reasoning. It was the small size of absolute surplus (from small holdings) and the mechanics of production which, the author admits, were what made credit so important. Yet he ends up by identifying the number and nature of credit agencies as the crucial variable determining the degree of dependence or independence of peasant households. The assumption appears to be that the increase in the number of credit agencies would in all instances make the recurring effects of small holdings and 'mechanics of production' irrelevant. But Washbrook's faith in the 'impersonal systems of credit', i.e. 'mercantile interests external to the locality', is based on false weights attached to the fulcrum of dependence. Where the structure of dependence is rooted in a skewed distribution of property rights and the 'mechanics of agricultural production', the dealings of newer systems of credit and trading need not create an independent peasantry, but in fact deepen that dependence by superimpos-

<sup>22</sup>David Washbrook, 'Economic Development and Social Stratification in Rural Madras: The "Dry Region" 1878-1929', in Dewey and Hopkins (eds.), pp. 70-1.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 71.

ing themselves on existing patterns of dominance.<sup>24</sup> Where the peasantry was able to gain considerably by direct access to expanding markets, it was in most cases an independent peasantry, i.e. not constrained by pigmy sized holdings, adverse effects of land tenure or the mechanics of agricultural production.

In fact, Washbrook's own description of a 'middle peasantry' in the 'wet' regions of the Kistna and Godavari deltas proves our point. Here an expansion of artificial irrigation in the mid-nineteenth century and the consequent growth of multi-cropping mitigated the adverse effects of the small size of holdings, and enabled the peasants to meet the state demand *on time* from their own resources. An independent peasantry capable of carrying on from one production cycle to another on their own came into being, and unfettered by a dependence on usurious traders and landlords (which the 'dry' region experienced because of the mechanics of production, among other things) gained a direct access to expanding markets. It is the existence of this independent peasantry and a relatively equitable distribution of property rights that seem to be the more important structural features of the 'wet' districts, rather than a multiplicity of credit agencies.<sup>25</sup> In other regions more akin to 'dry' Madras, multiplicity of markets came as no panacea to a peasantry which did not have an open access to a single one of them.<sup>26</sup>

The emphasis on credit networks is carried to an extreme in the work of another Cambridge historian, Peter Musgrave. His study of the U.P. countryside concentrates on highlighting the factional or 'connectional' basis of all relationships and transactions, credit included.<sup>27</sup> The well-being of the 'villager', according to Musgrave, rested 'upon a generally recognized need not to be left alone, an individual in a world of connections and following . . .'<sup>28</sup>

<sup>24</sup>Cf. S. Amin, 'Sugarcane Cultivation in Gorakhpur, U.P., c. 1890-1940: A Study in the Interrelations between Capitalistic Enterprise and a Dependent Peasantry' (Oxford D. Phil. thesis, 1978).

<sup>25</sup>Cf. D. Washbrook, 'Country Politics: Madras 1880 to 1930', in J. Gallagher, G. Johnson and A. Seal (eds.), *Locality, Province and Nation: Essays on Indian Politics, 1870-1940* (Cambridge, 1973), pp. 188 ff; Washbrook, *The Emergence of Provincial Politics: The Madras Presidency, 1870-1920* (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 90-3.

<sup>26</sup>Amin, 'Sugarcane Cultivation', pp. 92-4.

<sup>27</sup>For a critique of the indiscriminate use of 'factionalism' as a tool of analysis for studying rural India, see David Hardiman's contribution to this volume.

<sup>28</sup>P. J. Musgrave, 'An Indian Rural Society: Aspects of the Structure of Rural Society in the United Provinces, 1860-1920' (Cambridge Ph.D. thesis, 1976), p. 64.

Credit understandably figures in this kind of a setup as an important system of resources. Musgrave starts his discussion of credit in rural U.P. with two general propositions. First, that money-lending was a 'popular way of investing money', and secondly, that credit and trade were inter-linked. All sorts of men lent money—*mahants* and pandits, orthodox Muslims and scions of nawabi families, prosperous co-sharers and wily *telis*, school teachers and butchers were all equally involved.<sup>29</sup> Musgrave is so preoccupied with viewing this flurry of money-lending in terms of the 'normal rules of the village connection'<sup>30</sup> that he does not deal adequately with how credit actually related to agricultural production. There are cursory references to the importance of 'short-term credit' to tide the peasants over 'the disasters and delays of the seasons', especially when revenue instalments fell due before crops could be marketed, and the difficulties felt by tenants and labourers, presumably between harvests.<sup>31</sup> The specificities of agricultural production and the backdrop that these may have provided to the unity of trade and credit does not receive more than passing mention. The focus is on the protean 'connections' in the villages.

However, if the capital of the money-lenders was augmented, as Musgrave himself suggests, by their getting a higher price for commodities than that actually received by their debtor-peasants, then there is all the more reason for investigating the conditions under which cash could be recouped in terms of low-priced commodities. In the pre-railway age a part of the trading profits could have been due to bottlenecks in the markets (seasonal variation of prices and variations between different markets). But increasingly these seem to have been the result of the intervention of money-lending trading capital in the very process of production.

An argument along these lines has been conducted by Jairus Banaji for late nineteenth-century Maharashtra.<sup>32</sup> Basing himself

<sup>29</sup>Musgrave, 'Rural Credit and Rural Society in the U.P., 1850-1920', in Dewey and Hopkins (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 217-19. It is necessary however to put this phenomenon in its proper perspective. Small-scale money-lending among neighbours and peasants was in fact characteristic of all peasant societies; it was as common in thirteenth-century France as in sixteenth-century England. Cf. G. Duby, *Rural Economy and Country Life in the Medieval West* (London, 1968), p. 254; R.H. Tawney, 'Introduction' to Thomas Wilson, *A Discourse Upon Usury, 1572* (London, 1925), pp. 19-23.

<sup>30</sup>Musgrave, in Dewey and Hopkins, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 216, 218, 229.

<sup>32</sup>Banaji, *op. cit.*



on Marx's views on 'interest bearing capital' and a recently published appendix to *Capital*, Banaji argues that where the reproduction of peasant households from one cycle to another is dependent on advances from 'monied capitalists', we have an instance of what Marx termed 'the formal subsumption of labour by capital'. While the form of the enterprise (peasant households) and the labour process (small-scale production) remain as of before, the monied capitalists are in fact extracting surplus value as interest. This hypothesis is buttressed by a host of illustrations from the Deccan districts, showing how small peasants were forced (by the manipulation of purely economic relationships) to part with most of their produce at harvest time to money-lender-traders, who doled out means of subsistence and working capital to enable production to take place anew. Banaji's central concern is to establish the command of the 'monied capitalists' over the small peasant production process. But curiously this 'intervention' is described and theorized without adequate consideration of the actual process in question. What are the circumstances, apart from the operation of monied capital itself, which result in the inability of the small peasant to 'reproduce [his means of production] from the proceeds of the sale of his commodities?'<sup>33</sup> Here Banaji, following Marx, refers to the 'latent crisis of simple reproduction which the small peasant economy is thrown into either under the pressure of series of bad years or for more basic structural reasons, such as State exploitation of peasant production'.<sup>34</sup> This is all we have on the structure and temporality of the small peasant production process whose subordination to monied capitalists is Banaji's central theme.

Perhaps the only recent attempt to look closely at peasant agriculture in a manageably small region over a long time-period and with anything approaching the required detail is Colin Fisher's unpublished study of indigo in north Bihar.<sup>35</sup> Fisher seeks to highlight a quasi-dualism between a bastard plantation system, with its reliance on 'indigenous controllers of land', and a purely peasant sector of the local agrarian economy. His analysis, aimed

<sup>33</sup>Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, Part III (Moscow, 1971), p. 487.

<sup>34</sup>Banaji, *op. cit.*, p. 1390. Cf. *Capital*, vol. III (Moscow, 1971), pp. 594-98, where Marx though concentrating on contingent factors, like the death of the peasant's cow placing him in the grip of the usurer, does suggest that the characteristic domain of the usurer is the use of money as a means of payment.

<sup>35</sup>C.M. Fisher, 'Indigo Plantation and Agrarian Society in North Bihar in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century' (Cambridge Ph. D. thesis, 1976).

at underplaying the well-known depredatory aspects of indigo cultivation, is based on an ingenious study of the geo-ecology and cropping pattern of the region. The contrast between the late rice dominated uplands to the north of the Bur Gandak and the more fertile mixed cropped lands to the south of the river is used as a backdrop against which the differing reactions to the incursions of the *nilhe sahebs* is studied.<sup>36</sup> Cash advances given to the peasants are placed in a temporal context: 'Advances were an important part of peasant agriculture and the timing of the advance was often a more important consideration than the size of the final payment'.<sup>37</sup> Fisher underplays the coercion that the planters exercised over the Bhojpuri peasants along with unremunerative prices for their indigo; 'there were other reasons which would have made indigo unpopular whatever the price'; its unpopularity consisted in the 'disruption of normal peasant production'. The big push in indigo cultivation after 1830 was at the expense of 'peasant priorities'.<sup>38</sup> Indigo monopolized the land for a year and demanded more labour than any other crop, sugarcane included. The planters caused it to be grown on the best lands which would have otherwise borne two crops. The enforced fallowing during the cold weather meant sacrificing the *rabi*, which was the more galling as land required a minimum of ploughing after oilseeds and pulses had been gathered in February.<sup>39</sup>

But despite the subversion of 'peasant priorities' it seems that in the case of indigo, physical force, direct supervision and low prices were the important factors which accounted for the peasants' aversion to incorporating the crop within their harvest calendar. As we shall presently see, cane cultivation which was an equally time- and labour-consuming crop, was sought in neighbouring and ecologically similar Gorakhpur to be incorporated within an equally complex set of peasant practices. Despite the hold of merchant money-lenders, but presumably due to the absence of direct coercion characteristic of indigo in north Bihar, cane culture in Gorakhpur was almost regarded as a fetish: *Ikh tak kheti haathi tak banaj*, ran a local proverb.<sup>40</sup>

In this essay a somewhat different perspective is offered for comprehending the significance of this saying for the peasants of

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., pp. 8-26, 149-67.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., pp. 70, 74, 75-6.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., pp 76-86

<sup>40</sup>'What elephants are to merchandize sugarcane is to agriculture.'

Gorakhpur in eastern Uttar Pradesh. A description of agricultural practices is followed by a digression into the world of the money-lender-manufacturer and the peasant. But while the existing historiography takes this realm as the universe of its discourse, we move once again to the specificities of small peasant production to indicate what in our opinion is the structural basis for the operation of usurious capital in the Indian countryside. We start with an analysis of the cultivation of sugarcane and the manufacture of raw sugar in eastern U.P. Various practices associated with these processes are noticed in order to arrive at some idea of the time, labour and organization involved in producing raw sugar for the market. In the next two sections we alter the perspective somewhat, by shifting the focus from sugarcane, the crop, to raw sugar, the commodity, with the 'buyers' of this peasant product very much in the picture. An overview of the market for raw sugar is presented for the main cane tracts of U.P. and the relative importance of the sugar refiner and the merchant money-lender underscored. Finally, the significance of sugarcane for small peasants is discussed in terms of the specific character of the turnover in agriculture and the hiatus between working time and production time. This hiatus, we argue in the last section, corresponds to the want of congruence between the farm calendar and the routine of rent collections. At a general level the argument is that the exchange and production relations which appear at first sight to emanate from the demands of a particular crop, assume their full significance only in the context of their role and place within the overall production process and the economic condition of the peasantry in a given area. Instead of discussing in great detail the pyramid of property rights, the differentiation within the peasantry, the movements of population, prices, rent and revenue, I have tried to abstract from all these the conditions under which the reproduction of small peasant household economies came to be dependent on the cultivation of sugarcane for usurious dealers. The emphasis is on the small peasant production process; on a long enduring structure within which the 'high valued' culture of cane is elevated almost to the level of a strategy in the agricultural practice of the countryside.

## II The Culture of Sugarcane

*Gur*, or raw sugar was the predominant commodity form of sugarcane in the Gorakhpur region in eastern U.P. in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.<sup>41</sup> In fact, throughout U.P. only one specific type of cane—*paunda*—was grown as an edible market-garden crop.<sup>42</sup> Sugarcane as a field crop—*ikh*, *ukh* or *ganna* in the indigenous parlance—was cultivated by the peasantry not so much for its gross tonnage, as for its *gur* potential. The outturn of raw sugar, though obviously dependent on the amount of juice contained in a unit of cane, was nevertheless substantially determined by the quality of the juice (the sucrose content), the efficiency of indigenous crushers (*kolhus*) and the care and attention taken in the boiling and clarifying of the juice. *Sarauti*, *mango*, *reonra*, *hemja* and *baraukha* were the predominant indigenous cane varieties of Gorakhpur.<sup>43</sup> *Sarauti* (from *sravati*: Sanskrit for 'oozes out') was the leading native variety, not solely because of its high yield of *gur*, but because it demanded relatively less attention and gave the best results under ordinary methods of cultivation. It figured in peasant sayings as a veritable synonym for sugarcane: 'Grow *sarauti* sugarcane and *dehula* rice, and nothing else', ran an eastern U.P. proverb.<sup>44</sup>

If *sarauti* was a poor man's cane, *mango* was prized for its excellent *gur*-making potential. Indeed, if the following proverb from Azamgarh is to be taken literally, the village maidens would rather lose their lovers' affection than steal a *mango* cane from their fathers' fields:

*Yaar mera pyara, ukh meri mango;  
aadhi nahin doongi, poori kyon maango?*<sup>45</sup>

Although my sweetheart you are dear to me, why should you ask for a whole cane? I am not prepared to part with even a half of it because it is *mango* (and therefore so valuable).

<sup>41</sup>With the proliferation of sugar mills in the region in the 1930s an important change took place—now sugarcane was in demand in its natural form. However, this development is outside the scope of the present essay.

<sup>42</sup>*Ain-i-Akbari* (Tr. H.S. Jarrett), vol. I (Calcutta, 1891), p. 69; Noël Deerr, *A History of Sugar*, vol. I (London, 1949), pp. 51-2; S.M. Hadi, *The Sugar Industry of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh* (Allahabad, 1902), p. 4; W.C. Bennett (ed.), *Gazetteer of the Province of Oudh*, vol. II, p. 161.

<sup>43</sup>Buchanan-Hamilton, 'Statistical Account of Gorakhpur' (1811-15), Mss. Eur. G-23, table 14, India Office Records; *Statistical, Descriptive and Historical Account of the North-Western Provinces*, vol. VI (Allahabad, 1881), p. 325 [Hereafter *NWP Gazetteer, 1881*]; Hadi, op. cit., ch. II. <sup>44</sup>Hadi, op. cit., p. 8. <sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 16.

Of all his various crops sugarcane demanded the time, labour and attention of the U.P. peasant most. It was believed in Azamgarh that it took 'pretty nearly the whole labour of two men and four bullocks for five months to cultivate a *beegah* satisfactorily. 'Unless a man has seven sons and twelve grandsons he should not cultivate sugarcane', went a Bengali saying in a slightly exaggerated vein.<sup>46</sup> Lacking the requisite bullock power for the repeated preparatory tillage for cane, the Azamgarh peasants clubbed their meagre resources under the *harsajh*<sup>47</sup> system. Another variant of this arrangement was the *tijara* system, whereby peasants without bullocks worked two days for another cultivator and got the use of his plough in exchange for the third.<sup>48</sup>

Despite the use of organic manure and the penning of sheep,<sup>49</sup> land for sugarcane required considerable periods of fallow to regain its productivity. The ideal system of crop rotation was where cane was preceded by a full year's fallow.<sup>50</sup> However, as this meant a complete loss of both the *kharif* and the *rabi*, this was a rare practice confined perhaps to the most substantial cultivators. A more common practice was to take an early *kharif* (*bhadai* rice, *manrua*, *kodon*, *juar*) in early September and let the land rest for the next five months before planting it with sugarcane.<sup>51</sup> A much more intensive use of land, which affected both the immediate yields and the fertility of the soil, was resorted to by the ordinary peasants of east U.P. As their meagre grain stocks did not last the long fallows a succession of quick harvests was necessary.<sup>52</sup> And as their size of holdings was small (see Table below), an intensive exploitation of their lands in which sugarcane played an important part was the usual practice.

The small size of the holdings in Gorakhpur is brought out by the following data collected in the mid-1880s:<sup>53</sup>

<sup>46</sup>'Report on the Revenue Rates Proposed for Pergunnah Mahoul, Azamgarh, 17 April 1873 by H.M. Rogers', *Revenue Reporter*, vol. II, p. 158; Wynne Sayer, 'Sugarcane Cultivation in Non-tropical Parts of India', *Agricultural Journal of India*, vol. VIII (1916), p. 365.

<sup>47</sup>Har-plough, *sajhya*-partnership. Cf. Dumont, *op. cit.*, p. 91, for a brief but suggestive discussion of such a system among allied kin in South India

<sup>48</sup>*Azamgarh Settlement Report, 1881*, para 350. (Hereafter *Azamgarh SR, 1881*)

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, para 357

<sup>50</sup>Hadi, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-30

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 37, 41; *Azamgarh SR, 1881*, para 408; *U.P. District Gazetteer: Basti*, by H.R. Nevill (Allahabad 1907), p. 42; *NWP Gazetteer*, vol. VI, 1881, p. 325.

<sup>52</sup>Cf. below sec. VII.

<sup>53</sup>*Gorakhpur Settlement Report, 1891*, pt. I, p. 203. (Hereafter *Gorakhpur SR, 1891*).

*Average Holdings of Land in U.P. Regions, 1882 (in acres)*

Type of Tenancy Occupancy	Upper Doab	Middle Doab	Lower Doab	Trans-Ghaghra	Rohilkhand	Bundelkhand
Tenants	8.6	6.7	3.7	3.9	5.2	6.2
Tenants at Will	7.2	5.7	2.6	3.1	3.6	4.9

Note Upper Doab=Saharanpur, Muzaffarnagar, Meerut, Bulandshahr, Aligarh.

Middle Doab=Mathura, Agra, Etah, Mainpuri

Lower Doab=Farrukhabad, Kanpur, Fatehpur.

Trans-Ghaghra=Gorakhpur and Basti.

Rohilkhand=Bijnor, Moradabad, Bareilly, Pilibhit, Shahjahanpur, Baduan

Bundelkhand=Hamirpur, Jalaun, Banda, Jhansi

Gorakhpur division covered the trans-Ghaghra districts of Basti and Gorakhpur together with Azamgarh, south of the river.

Source. J.F. Duthie and J.B. Fuller, *Field and Garden Crops of the North Western Provinces and Oudh* (Roorkee, 1882), pt 1, p. 111

In the region south of the river Ghaghra there was even less land per head,<sup>54</sup> and this resulted in a more intensive cultivation. Thus those with little land in Azamgarh sowed peas after an early *kharif* instead of keeping the land fallow. This meant planting the cane crop a bit later, in the middle or end of *Chait* (March-April) instead of *Phagun* (February-March), but this arrangement yielded an additional crop of *rabi* peas. Others mixed *arhar* (*cajanus indicus*) with the early *kharif* in *Asarh* (June-July). The *arhar* crop occupied the land till February-March (*Phagun*) or March-April (*Chait*), depending on the variety, when it was dug up and sugarcane

Proprietary Holdings	3.18 acres
Exproprietary Holdings	2.76 "
Occupancy Holdings	1.83 "
Tenants-at-will Holdings	1.36 "
Rent-free Tenants Holdings	1.91 "

<sup>54</sup>Cf. 'Revenue Administration Report, Azamgarh, 1885-86', Dept. XIII-Basta III, Commissioner's Record Room, Gorakhpur.

planted. Some even put cane after barley and barley after an early *kharif*. But this was the most inferior system of the lot, and did not leave any time for the preparatory tillage of cane fields.<sup>55</sup> These crop rotations, in which sugarcane figured in quick succession with other crops, were not peculiar to Azamgarh in the 1880s, when the district was showing unmistakable signs of overpopulation and consequent exploitation of land.<sup>56</sup> These arrangements were also to be found in an institutionalized form in the zamindari of Banaras in the 1780s as well in the sparsely populated tarai district of Sitapur in the 1870s.<sup>57</sup>

The importance of the fallow for the quality and outturn of cane is underscored by its institutionalization in another form—in its relation to rents. Considered superficially, sugarcane carried a higher rental than ordinary food crops. In the Kheri district in Awadh tarai, land grown with sugarcane paid double in rent than the ordinary *harjinsa*.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, sugarcane in certain *tappas* of Azamgarh district was 'taxed' in the 1820s at Rs 10 a *bigha*, while the charge on *harjins* and rice lands was Rs 3 to 5 and Rs 2 to 3-8 respectively.<sup>59</sup> But it would be inaccurate to speak of differential rents on 'cane lands' or on the sugarcane crop. In Gorakhpur as in the rest of north India there was no monoculture of sugarcane, nor was the crop cultivated like opium, vegetables or transplanted rice on specific plots earmarked for it.<sup>60</sup> Evidently, references to 'cane rent' in the literature pertain more to an enhanced rental on the capacity of peasant holdings to grow sugarcane, than a special or differential rent on the crop or the cane field itself.<sup>61</sup>

It seems tempting to suggest that the real determinant of a higher rent on holdings on which cane was grown in a definite variety of crop-rotations was the nature of the fallow itself. Both yields and fertility seem to have been affected by the nature and duration of the fallow. Yields were reported to have declined by as

<sup>55</sup>Azamgarh SR, 1881, para 408.

<sup>56</sup>Revenue Administration Report, Azamgarh, 1885-86'.

<sup>57</sup>East India Sugar: Papers Respecting the Culture and Manufacture of Sugar in British India: Also Notes on the Cultivation of Sugar in Other Parts of Asia with Miscellaneous Information Respecting Sugar (London, 1822), pp. 188 ff.; Sitapur SR, 1875, p. 20.

<sup>58</sup>Oudh Gazetteer, vol. II, 1871, p. 161.

<sup>59</sup>J.T. Reade(?), 'Minutes on the Rights and Conditions of the Ryots of Chakleh Azimgurh', para 19, Mss. Eur. D. 279, India Office Records.

<sup>60</sup>For the monoculture of transplanted rice (*jarhan*) in Gorakhpur and Basti villages bordering on the Nepal tarai, see Basti SR, 1891, pp. 20-1; Basti District Gazetteer, 1907, p. 40.

<sup>61</sup>See, for instance, Mss. Eur. D. 279, India Office Records; Sitapur SR, op. cit.; Revenue Reporter, vol. II, p. 189; Azamgarh SR, 1881, para 344.

much as a third if cane was planted after a *kharif* than if no autumn crops had been gathered, and there is evidence from Gorakhpur that indiscriminate cropping without proper fallowing (or manuring) tended to affect cane outturn in the 1860s.<sup>62</sup> The commercial resident at Banaras had reported at length on the connection between cane cultivation, fallowing and rents in a report at the turn of the eighteenth century.<sup>63</sup> Nearly a hundred years later the settlement officer of Sitapur district found four well-marked rates prevalent in *pargana* Mahul, 'regulated entirely by the season at which the cane is sown, or more strictly by the length of time during which the land is occupied by the crop between preparation for sowing and actual development'.<sup>64</sup>

These rates moved inversely to the deterioration in cane culture consequent on a shortening of the fallow and the introduction of other crops in the cane harvest cycle.<sup>65</sup> Thus the rate was the lowest, if sugarcane was planted after the gathering of gram in *Chait* (March-April), as this did not leave any time for preparing the fields. If *maash* (a late *kharif* pulse) had been harvested in November leaving *Pus* to *Magh* (late November-early February) for tending the land for a late sowing in *Phagun* (February-March) a higher rate was charged. The rate was higher still if the disposal of early rice in *Kuar* (September-October) allowed for a four-month fallow for the ensuing cane crop, and the highest if sugarcane was preceded by a full year's fallow.<sup>66</sup>

The Sitapur example might suggest at first sight that the poorer peasants who deviated from the ideal patterns of cane culture stole a march on the richer peasants (who normally allowed for long fallows) by not only having more crops but paying lower rents as well. But such a conclusion would be hasty for two reasons. First, this ideal dovetailing of rents and fallow was not as neat in other cane tracts as in Sitapur district.<sup>67</sup> Secondly, as we shall presently see, for the poorer peasants of Gorakhpur a quick succession of harvests could not compensate adequately for the problems stemming from the nature of turnover in agriculture as such.<sup>68</sup>

Sowing, which involved planting foot-long cane pieces (*patan-*

<sup>62</sup>Report on the Settlement of the Goruckpore-Bustee District, vol 1 (Allahabad, 1871), p. 46.

<sup>63</sup>See note 57 above.

<sup>64</sup>Sitapur SR, 1875, p. 20.

<sup>65</sup>See above, pp. 54-6

<sup>66</sup>Sitapur SR.

<sup>67</sup>Cf. *Jinspher* (lit. crop-rotation) rents in Azamgarh: *Azamgarh SR*, 1881, para 345.

<sup>68</sup>Cf. sec VIII below.



ars) after intensive ploughing, as we have seen, took place during February-April, depending on the previous crop taken from the field. The number of ploughings varied ideally from 15 to 20 in the west of the province to 20 to 40 in Gorakhpur and Azamgarh districts. It seems that one of the reasons why the number of ploughings increased from west to east was because the weight of the plough and the strength of the cattle decreased in the same direction. The plough was the smallest and much lighter in the rice tracts of eastern U.P. and Awadh, where it weighed only about 17-18 lbs. The corresponding weights of the plough in central and upper Doab were 28 lbs and 50 lbs respectively. The western U.P. ploughshare had more iron content to it than its eastern U.P. counterpart. There was iron round the edge of the sole, and instead of the short spike of the *purabiya* plough, it had a long iron bar which projected behind and was thrust forward as its point wore down. The cattle of Gorakhpur and Azamgarh were also by far the weakest, possibly on account of the relatively lower nutritive value of rice straw as fodder compared to that of the *karbi* of *juar* and *hajra* used in the west. As the settlement officer sardonically remarked, even the abundant grass in Gorakhpur did not seem to have been as good for the cattle as the *dub* of Mathura and Agra!<sup>69</sup> Planting could also be delayed if the process of *gur* manufacture from the previous year's crop kept the peasants busy beyond the optimal point.<sup>70</sup>

An idea of the care and attention demanded by the crop can be gauged from the following Gorakhpuri saying:

*Ikh paundra bo le tu jo chahe hua nihaal,  
bhar bhar gaari khaad daal de, kod de kudaal;  
baar baar de paani usmen baandh bahut si suthri dhaal.  
Meethi lakri sab koi kheve baitha de fauran rakhiyaal.*<sup>71</sup>

If you want to be happy verging on the ecstatic, sow your sugarcane after a year's fallow. Spread cart loads of manure and hoe repeatedly with the *kudali*. Irrigate the field regularly, and fence and shield it with a hedge of *Hibiscus cannabinus*. Everyone (man and beast) likes the sweet-stick; have a watchman ready.

<sup>69</sup>Cf. Duthie and Fuller, *Field and Garden Crops*, p. x; *Gorakhpur SR*, 1891, p. 80; *Azamgarh SR*, 1881, para 350; Hadi, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

<sup>70</sup>G. Butt, 'Sugarcane Cultivation in Shahjahanpur District', *Revenue Reporter*, vol. III, p. 118.

<sup>71</sup>'Harvest Calen Jar Register', no. 7 of 1885-8, Settlement Shelf, Gorakhpur Record Room. Four cart-loads (about 60 maunds) were reckoned to have been sufficient for a *pakka higha* in Gorakhpur. See *NWP Gazetteer*, 1881, vol. VI, p. 325.

The main time-, labour-, and money-consuming operations in the interculture of cane were the intermittent hoeings followed by irrigation. In Gorakhpur 'three hoeings and thirteen waterings' were regarded as the norm. If rains were late then the labour expended on interculture increased enormously; as many as twenty 'waterings' might be needed to keep the growing plant alive.<sup>72</sup> Even if the rains were timely and followed the *nakshatras* (lunar asterisms) in which they were due, the labour expended in *kiyari* irrigation and hoeing remained phenomenal by any reckoning;<sup>73</sup> hoeing demanded more labour after irrigation anyway.

Harvesting spanned the months of *Pus* to *Phagun* (late December to early March), nearly a year after the *patanars* had been buried in the ground. The juice of cane cut earlier on in the season, though more abundant, was inferior in sucrose content to that harvested in January and February. One wonders if it was due to the slowness of the indigenous cattle mills that the harvesting season was not confined to these two optimal months, but was staggered from December through March.<sup>74</sup> The cutters stripped the cane of dry leaves on its side with a *hansia* (an unserrated sickle) and also cut off the green tops which, when chopped with a *gandasi*, served as fodder during January-March. Throughout the province in the late nineteenth century and in some Basti villages as late as the 1920s the cane cutters received their remuneration at a set rate of five canes per head together with all the green cane tops which had been chopped off. These latter were seldom sold and their value as fodder must have been considerable, for on the face of it this remuneration seems to have been less than the four seers of barley or rice, or 4 per cent of the harvested crop which fell to the lot of the Azamgarh *launihars* (rice reapers) in the 1870s.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>72</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>73</sup>Witness the two Gorakhpuri proverbs:

1. *Maagh ka jaara jeth ki dhoop, bare kaash se upje ukh.*

2. *Ikh karen sab koi, jo beech mein jeth na hoi.*

1: 'What with cold and frost in the month of *magh* and the heat of *jeth*, it requires great cultivation to make sugarcane grow.'

2: 'Every Tom, Dick and Harry would grow sugarcane, if the hot month of *jeth* did not intervene.'

<sup>74</sup>Duthie and Fuller, op. cit., p. 59.

<sup>75</sup>Hadi, op. cit., pp. 40, 59; *Revenue Reporter*, vol. III, p. 122; U.P. *Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee (1930)*, *Evidence*, vol. II, p. 181; *Royal Commission on Agriculture in India (Londott, 1927)*, *Evidence*, vol. VII, p. 236.

There were two other features of cane cultivation in the Gorakhpur region, and in Gorakhpur district specifically, which tended to modify the pattern and intensity of agricultural practices described above. One was the system of taking a second crop (*ratoon*) from the previous year's plant crop, and the other the less intensive culture of cane in the *bhat* soils of Gorakhpur district. The second year's *ratoon* crop (*peri* in Gorakhpur) was raised by leaving the stumps from the previous year's crop in the ground and igniting the dry cane leaves. Flames spread over the harvested fields without however injuring the stumps, which after a little irrigation emerged phoenix-like from beneath the ashes which also served as manure. Considerable saving in time, labour and money resulted from this process, but the outturn was much lower and the crop susceptible to pests.<sup>76</sup>

The intensity of cane culture naturally varied with the soil on which the crop was planted. In Gorakhpur, the natural soils could be, and in fact were, classified by the peasantry into *bangar* and *bhat*. *Bangar* was the ordinary alluvial soil of the province, stronger and more fertile than *bhat*, but less retentive of moisture. In these relatively harder soils ploughing was difficult and irrigation essential, but the yield of *kharif*, *rabi* and cane was much higher than in the lighter *bhat* soils. *Bangar* with its variants was the standard soil of the Deoria, Sadr, Bansaon and Maharajganj tehsils. *Bhat*—the soil of the valley of Gandak—was a light calcereous soil, found on both sides of the river in North Bihar and Gorakhpur district. In Gorakhpur it was the predominant soil of Padrauna tehsil which lay between the little Gandak on the east and the great Gandak on the west. It was also found in patches along these two rivers in other parts of the district as well.

On the whole agriculture in *bhat* tracts required less capital and labour than in *bangar* lands. Less bullock power was needed to till the land, ploughing was relatively easier because of the nature of the soil, and less of it was required than in *bangar*. The amount of seed used per acre was also less because of the superior germinating power of the soil, which was more retentive of moisture. And perhaps what is even more important from the point of view of cane culture, crops could be gathered even in the drier seasons

<sup>76</sup>Hadi, *op. cit.*, p. 39; *Revenue Reporter*, vol. III, p. 115. For a General discussion, see, 'Note [on] Ratooning', *Imperial Council of Agricultural Research: Sugar Committee, Eighth Meeting, 1936*, app. iii, subject no. 16.

without recourse to irrigation. In fact, irrigation was deemed difficult because of the faster rate of water absorption, and hence not much resorted to. Though the average output from such lands was considered to be some 13 per cent less than in *bangar* soils, it was estimated that a peasant could cultivate with the same stock of capital and seed about 15 to 30 per cent more land and manage to get the same results as in *bangar* tracts.<sup>77</sup>

There is no conclusive evidence on differential rents between these two kinds of soils.<sup>78</sup> However, there is perfect unanimity that cane culture—without irrigation and much less preparatory tillage—on *bhat* lands was less intensive than in *bangar* tracts.<sup>79</sup> For this reason, the *bhat* soil dominated. Padrauna tehsil remained the premier cane growing region in the district. Even within the tehsil, *bhat* portions grew more cane than *bangar* villages.<sup>80</sup>

### III Working the Kolhu

With harvesting only half the job was over; the delicate task of raw sugar manufacture which involved a certain degree of organization lay ahead for the peasants. 'A widow can sow sugarcane, but it requires a householder to crush it', went a Bhojpuri proverb.<sup>81</sup> As the sucrose content of harvested cane declined if left uncrushed, cane sufficient to be pressed and boiled into *gur* in a single day was taken immediately to the 'pressing factory'.<sup>82</sup> The *kolhuar* consisted of a small court in which the cane press (*kolhu*) was set up. The *kolhu* was a large drum-shaped mortar, in which an almost upright timber beam or pestle was made to turn by an arrangement attaching it to a pair of circling bullocks. (See illustration) As the wooden and stone *kolhus* of the Gorakhpur region

<sup>77</sup>This discussion of *bhat* and *bangar* is based on *Rent-Rate Report of the Northern Portion of Padrauna, District Gorakhpur* (1916), para 20; *Rent-Rate Report on the Southern Portion of Padrauna, Pargana Sidhua Jobna, Tahsil Padrauna, District Gorakhpur (Deona Portion)*, 1917, p. 10; G.A. Grierson, *Bihar Peasant Life* (1885: rpt. Delhi, 1975), p. 167; M.A.G. Faruqi, *Shajra-i-Shadab* (Gorakhpur, 1901), p. 285. In neighbouring Saran district, cultivation of cane on *bhat* tracts cost 10 per cent less, but the output was also short by 20 per cent as compared to *bangar* lands. See *Saran SR, 1893-1901*, p. 171.

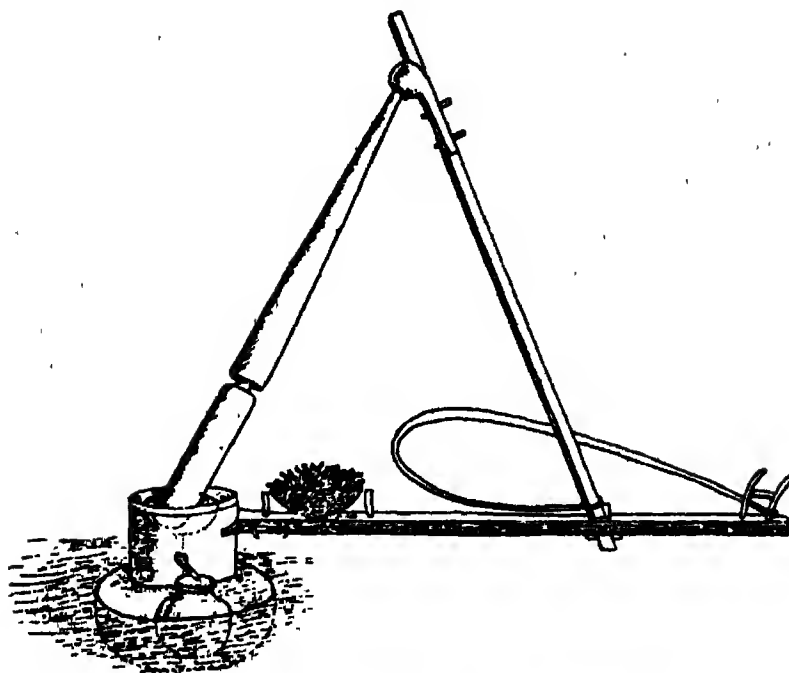
<sup>78</sup>*South Padrauna Report*, op. cit., p. 9; *Shajra-i-Shadab*, p. 285.

<sup>79</sup>*North Padrauna Report*, op. cit., para 25.

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 18 (map) and app. V.

<sup>81</sup>'Rand bove shahar pere.'

<sup>82</sup>There was a well-known injunction that no time should be lost between the harvesting of cane and its manufacture into raw sugar. Cf. W.H. Moreland, 'Note on Sugar Cultivation' [in U.P.], in *Report of the Committee Appointed to Inquire into the Prospects of Cultivation of Sugar by Indigo Planters of Bihar* (Calcutta, 1901).



The Gorakhpur Wooden Kolhu

Source: S. M. Hadi, *The Sugar Industry of the United Provinces and Oudh* (Allahabad, 1902), p. 55

operated on the mortar and pestle principle, it necessitated the chopping of the cane into small bits; 'an expensive part of the operation', as Buchanan noted in his Dinajpur report.<sup>83</sup> *Kolhus* in Azamgarh and the *cis*-Ghaghra districts generally, were fabricated from blocks of *chunar* stone brought up the Tons, *choti* Sarju and Gomti rivers. The cost of the stone *kolhu* was between Rs 38 and Rs 62, depending on size. No transport costs seem to have been incurred once the limits of up-country riverine transport had been reached. It is perhaps an indication of the peasant belief in the importance of cane that to help in the transport of stone *kolhus* free of charge from one village to another was regarded as an act of *punya*.<sup>84</sup> The cost of an average wooden *kolhu* in Gorakhpur is not available for the late nineteenth century. If the estimates from neighbouring Champaran district are any guide, then the expenditure, including the fees of the *Barhai*, would come to some Rs 4 to Rs 5 per annum.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>83</sup>Cited in *East India Sugar*, 1822, app. iii, p. 25.

<sup>84</sup>*Punya*: merit in the religious sense of the term. *Azamgarh SR*, 1881, para 436; Hadi, op. cit., p. 55; interviews with Dr V.B. Singh (of Azamgarh), Lucknow, 17 Jan. 1976 and Ramanuj Shukl, Deoria, 21 Oct. 1976.

<sup>85</sup>W.W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal* (London, 1871), vol. XIII, p. 265.

However, it is not very fruitful to arrive at the notional cost of a *kolhu*; there was an element of peasant co-operation in its working and even in its ownership, and this is difficult to measure monetarily. As a rule, three to six households clubbed together and invested in a *kolhu* which they used for crushing their respective crops under a complex arrangement. The reasons for this *sajhiya* were fairly obvious. The small acreage of sugarcane per head, the inadequacy of cattle stock, the desire to finish *gur* manufacture before the onset of the hot weather and in time to carry on with other agricultural operations like the planting of the next year's cane crop are the reasons that come readily to mind. Besides, *kolhuawan*, or a tax on *kolhus* levied by the zamindars, might have tended like the analogous *hunda* tax in Sikh Punjab to discourage the accumulation of *kolhus* in individual households.<sup>86</sup> Shares of the different peasant households, who owned the *kolhu* and pooled their labour and bullocks, were reckoned in units of 24 *taos* (amount of juice boiled at one time) or in the familiar 16 *anna* units. Under either arrangement about one-third of the *gur* produce went towards meeting the hire of the additional bullocks and the wages of the specialized labourers. The peasant whose cane had been milled, received two-thirds of the *gur* produced. Similarly, there was the *tiraha* system under which the hire of a *kolhu* by a peasant having no share in it was approximately one-third of the total produce.<sup>87</sup>

The labourers employed were the *katarwahi* (the bullock driver) and two *ghaniwahas* who chopped the cane into small pieces, fed the *kolhu*, removed the *khoiya* (refuse) and drew off the juice. Finally, there was the specialist *gur* boiler (the *pakwa* or *jhokwa*) who looked after the fire under the boiling pan and superintended the preparation of *gur*. His was a specialized and important job, for the value of *gur* would be decreased by some 50 per cent by excessive boiling and caramelization or by the failure of the juice to solidify into *gur*. In neighbouring Saran district the *jhokwa* was paid a higher rate than the other labourers: 5 per cent of the *gur* or its sale value, a quarter of a seer of scrapings from the pan and five sticks of cane daily; the fresh canes were used to buy the day's supply of tobacco and spices. His remuneration would average just under 4 annas per

<sup>86</sup>Field Notes and Interviews, Deoria, 1976; Cf. G. Watt, *A Dictionary of the Economic Products of India* (London, 1890), vol. VI, p. 294.

<sup>87</sup>Interviews with Ramanuj Shukl, Deoria, 21 Oct. 1976; Babu Genda Singh, Delhi, 11 Nov. 1975; cf. *Revenue Reporter*, vol. III, p. 126.

day as opposed to 1.5 annas in kind and cash paid to the other labourers in Azamgarh in the 1870s. Normally when the *kolhu* operated twenty-four hours a day the bullocks were increased to six and the number of labourers was also doubled.<sup>88</sup>

Cane juice strained of dirt and cane fibre was emptied into a boiling pan (*karah*), which was generally hired for the season. *Khoiya*, or dried up cane fibre, was used as fuel. The juice was boiled to one-fifth of its bulk, and on the instruction of the *pakwa* the *karah* was lifted off the fire and the substance kneaded with a wooden mallet. When it was sufficiently stiff and cool, it became *gur*.<sup>89</sup> When the boiled syrup was poured into earthen moulds, it became *bheli* (round lumps of *gur* weighing a quarter of a seer each). This was the usual practice in the Gorakhpur region. The bulk of the *gur* produced in Gorakhpur went by the name of *chiniha bheli*. This was very rich in sugar content and soft in texture, both qualities making it a suitable raw material for sugar refining. In some parts of Azamgarh district, however, another kind of raw sugar—*raab*—was made for the production of refined sugar, though *gur* was the general commodity form of sugarcane here as well.<sup>90</sup>

Before embarking on a discussion of the relationship between the *gur*-producing peasants of Gorakhpur and the market for their produce, we will make a short detour into the world of raw sugar production in central and western U.P., in order to establish that the picture generally drawn of an independent *gur*-producing peasantry does not apply to areas where there is a sizeable sugar refining sector. Gorakhpur, as we shall presently see, was one such region.

#### IV *Gur and Raab*

The distinction between *gur* and *raab* was characteristic of crude sugars produced throughout northern India.<sup>91</sup> *Gur* or *bheli*, as we have seen, was a solid dry mass; it required little refining and was also used for consumption by the bulk of the population. *Raab* (a semi-solid substance) was slightly more refined and was used

<sup>88</sup>See *Azamgarh SR*, 1881, p. 129; *Saran SR*, 1893-1901, p. 172.

<sup>89</sup>For details see *Azamgarh SR*, 1881, paras 435-54.

<sup>90</sup>*Ibid.*, para 445.

<sup>91</sup>'Note on the kinds of Sugar which may be classified as "Refined"', Oudh Revenue File 1247 of 1879-84, U.P. Archives, Lucknow; Duthie and Fuller, *op. cit.*; W.B. Birch, *Report on the Production and Manufacture of Sugar in Certain Districts of Bengal and the North-Western Provinces* (Calcutta, 1880).

primarily for manufacturing refined sugar. Unlike *gur*, the manufacture of *raab* is a much more elaborate process requiring a larger capital outlay and a more careful supervision by the money-lender-manufacturer.<sup>92</sup> Thus, while only one *karah* was needed for boiling juice into *gur*, the preparation of *raab* ordinarily required two.<sup>93</sup>

The *raab*-producing peasants, especially in Rohilkhand in central U.P., were greatly dependent on the sugar refiners (*khandsaris*). From the mid-nineteenth century the *khandsaris* intervened much more directly in the production of raw sugar by demanding *ras* or cane juice from the peasants. They converted the fresh cane juice into *raab* in their temporary boiling-sheds (*bel*) set up in the villages for the season. This *bel* system, emanating in Bareilly district in the 1850s, spread rapidly to other *raab*-producing tracts of Rohilkhand. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century the *raab*-producing peasants of Rohilkhand had by and large surrendered their control over raw sugar production to the money-lender-manufacturers.<sup>94</sup> The *khandsaris* had reduced them, in effect, to mere suppliers of freshly pressed cane juice.

The close links between money-lending, sugar refining and landlordism resulted here in the domination of the cane-growing peasantry in its most developed form. Advances were given by the *khandsaris* directly to the peasants or distributed through the landlords. A 'contractual' agreement to hypothecate the cane produce to the *khandsari's bel* was signed by the peasant who received the advance. A penalty clause guarding against independent *gur* production was entered, and the minions of the *khandsaris* toured the villages like the *gumashtas* of the Opium Department unearthing clandestine *gur* production.<sup>95</sup>

Some idea of the pseudo-contractuality and ornate legality which buttressed the economic domination of the peasantry by the *khandsaris* can be gathered from the following 'contract' executed in 1905:

<sup>92</sup>See B.C. Basu, 'A Note on the Manufacture of Sugar and its Improvement', 1890, para 11, in GOI, Rev. Agr. A File 89 of 1892, NAI, New Delhi.

<sup>93</sup>*Azamgarh SR*, 1881, p. 130. This was the case when the peasants themselves prepared *raab*.

<sup>94</sup>*Revenue Reporter*, vol.III, p. 131; Hadi, op. cit., p. 67.

<sup>95</sup>*Revenue Reporter*, op. cit., pp. 128 ff.



I, Rasul Khan, s/o Inayat Ullah Khan caste Pathan am a resident of Burhanpur, Tehsil Tilhar, district Shahjahanpur. Whereas I have borrowed Rs 99 half of which is Rs 49-8, from Abdul Qadir Khan of Shahjahanpur . . . as an advance (*peshgi*) in sugarcane and have brought into my use. It is agreed that in lieu of the said sum 300 maunds of juice katcha weight without mixing any water, produce of the year 1314 Fasli, will be delivered at the rate of Rs 28 per hundred maunds katcha weight from the month of Pus to the end of Phagun of the said year, at the bel of village Burhanpur after pressing the same during the day time and filling the *matha* to the brim and with free bagasse to the owners of the bel. If, however, there are rains or the bel is out of order, the juice will not be pressed. If however I prepare gur, rab or sell seed or the juice may be supplied to the said owners in less quantity or not at all, then I shall pay damages to the said owners at the rate of annas two per katcha maund. Whatever amount remains due from me will be paid without interest on chait badi pancham of the said year. If however the money is not paid then, I shall pay the sum with interest at the rate of Rs 2 per mensem from the date of the execution of the bond to the owners of the bel. It is further agreed that three big *dolchis* of juice will be given to the said owners as bel expenses.<sup>96</sup>

Advances were made to a large number of peasants in the same or adjoining villages, who brought their *kolhus* and fixed them in rows of eight outside the *khandsari's* boiling shed. Here the cane juice was boiled under a rather elaborate process. A set of five pans, varying in size and depth, were arranged on the *chulha* and *raab* of the right consistency was prepared under the supervision of the *khandsaris*. In Shahjahanpur district in the 1870s expert *halwais* (juice boilers) were summoned from as far as Mainpuri!

Under this system the *khandsari* and his men on the spot reigned supreme. Every juice-filled *matha* was taken straight to the boiling shed, the *khoyya* (dried up cane fibre) went as fuel to the *bel*; even the cane juice falling to the share of the *kolhu* operators as part wages was hypothecated to the manufactory! There was no real market price for cane juice because there was hardly a demand for it.<sup>97</sup> Accounts were settled on the basis of a notional price worked out at a panchayat at Baragaon in Shahjahanpur and Shahnagar in

<sup>96</sup> Ibid in *Royal Commission on Agriculture in India, Evidence*, vol. VII, pp. 37-8.

<sup>97</sup> Thus it was estimated in 1940 that less than 20 per cent of the total *raab* production was sold in the market. See *Report on the Marketing of Sugar in India and Burma* (New Delhi, 1943), p. 61.

Bijnor, which manipulated prices to the advantage of the *khandsaris*. The circle of indebtedness to the *khandsari* and the pressing of cane juice for his *raab*-making *bel* was self-perpetuating.<sup>98</sup> The case of a village in Badaun district where in the 1920s two-thirds of the cane-growing peasants were indebted to the tune of two years' rent and where Rs 20,000 out of a total debt of Rs 21,000 was owed to *khandsaris*, is a dramatic testimony to this fact.<sup>99</sup> In neighbouring Moradabad an experimental sugar factory in the early twentieth century ground to a halt, as 'the indebtedness of the cane growers to the local *khandsaris* enabled the latter to maintain a firm grip upon them and largely to prevent the delivery of their cane to the sugar factory'.<sup>100</sup>

The relationship of the peasants to the *khandsaris* was described by a settlement officer as follows:

Though convenient in one way to the cultivator, as giving him the command of a few rupees just when he wants them to pay his rent, yet the system is ruinous to him in the long run. Once in debt he can hardly extricate himself; for the *price* of *rus* in future is always fixed by the *khandsari* below the market price, and the rate of interest is raised. The cultivator must consent, or be sued in the Civil Courts for the balance due, sold up and ruined. I have known as low a price as Rs 16 per 100 *kutch*a maunds entered in the bonds, when the ruling price in the open market was Rs 26 and 27 [emphasis in original].<sup>101</sup>

Under such conditions it was obviously more profitable for independent peasant households to manufacture *gur*, and detailed calculations from Shahjahanpur in the 1870s showed that 'profits' per acre from *gur* manufacture were indeed 175 per cent higher. But the integration of the *khandsari* with the agrarian economy was such that only a minority of cane growers—zamindars unconnected with sugar refining, and substantial peasants who did not take advances—prepared *gur*.<sup>102</sup> In this context it is justifiable to make a sharp distinction between the dependent *ras/raab* producing peasant and the independent *gur* producer. Drawing on this contrast an experienced official commented in 1890: 'The cultivator is in fact not a free agent. If he is not in debt he will make *gur*, and the

<sup>98</sup>See for instance, *Shahjahanpore SR*, 1874, pp. xv-xxiii; *Bareilly SR*, 1874, pp.94-8; *Moradabad SR*, pp. 47-8; Hadi, op. cit., pp. 67-75; *Revenue Reporter*, vol. III, pp. 128-60.

<sup>99</sup>*U.P. Banking Enquiry Report, Evidence*, vol.II, p. 51.

<sup>100</sup>*Report of the Indian Sugar Committee*, 1920 (Simla, 1921), para 282.

<sup>101</sup>*Bareilly SR*, 1874, p. 95.

<sup>102</sup>*Revenue Reporter*, vol.III, pp. 129, 143-4.

conditions of a village in Rohilkhand can be ascertained at once by finding out whether the cultivators make *gur* or are under bonds to deliver sugar juice.<sup>103</sup> The outturn of *raab* was about 10 per cent higher than that of *gur*, and even where the prices of the two commodities were equal as in Shahabad (Bihar), there seems to have been a preference on the part of the peasants to make *gur* rather than *raab*.<sup>104</sup>

The archetype of the independent *gur* producers were the substantial and prosperous peasants of Meerut and Muzaffarnagar districts in western U.P. Here cane was cultivated and *gur* manufactured without the characteristic system of usurious advances. A high quality edible *gur* was produced by the peasants and exported to the *gur* markets of U.P. and Punjab without any further refining.<sup>105</sup> Here the *gur beopari* did not figure prominently because the peasants were independent enough to market their own *gur* or sell it to the trader in an open market. The Meerut peasants in the late nineteenth century had gained a direct access to the market; in the 1940s 60 per cent of the marketable surplus of *gur* in western U.P. was disposed of by the peasants themselves.<sup>106</sup> The equivalent of the usurious sugar manufacturer (*khandsari*) of Rohilkhand was absent here because hardly one-sixth of the total output of raw sugar was ever refined. Most of the total marketed value of the sugarcane produce therefore reached the pockets of the average Meerut peasant without the *gur* trader or the sugar refiner being in a position to appropriate any substantial part of it.<sup>107</sup>

It is perhaps this contrast between Meerut and Rohilkhand that has led Levkovsky to regard *gur* production as a 'feature of natural economy', and *raab* production under the *bel* system as a 'superstructure built upon petty commodity production'.<sup>108</sup> But such a sharp distinction between *gur* and *raab* production was valid only where there was substantial independent production of *gur*, as by the rich peasants of Meerut, or where most of the peasants

<sup>103</sup>See GOI, Agr. Noting in GOI, Rev. Agr. A File of June 1889, KW, NAI, New Delhi.

<sup>104</sup>Report on Sugar in Bengal and NWP, 1880, paras 63-4.

<sup>105</sup>Raw sugar accounted for 98 per cent of all sugar stuffs exported from Meerut division in the 1870s. Between 1866 and 1891, 64,000 maunds of refined sugar was exported from Muzaffarnagar (by rail) as opposed to 6,78,818 maunds of raw sugar. See Duthie and Fuller, pp. 60-1; *Muzaffarnagar SR*, 1892, p. 25.

<sup>106</sup>Musgrave, 'Rural Credit in U.P.', in Dewey and Hopkins, op. cit., p. 224; *Sugar Marketing Report*, 1943, p. 202.

<sup>107</sup>Duthie and Fuller, op. cit., p. 59; Hadi, op. cit., p. 111.

<sup>108</sup>A. I. Levkovsky, *Capitalism in India: Basic Trends in its Development* (New Delhi, 1966), pp. 198, 213.

laboured under the *ras*-demanding *khandsaris*. *Gur* production, in this context, appeared as an independent preserve of peasant production, because the *khandsaris* of Rohilkhand did not require *gur* for their raw material. They went instead for a specialized intermediate good—*ras* or *raab*. In Gorakhpur no such distinction existed between *gur* and *raab* in terms of relations of production. Here *gur* itself was the intermediate good used by the sugar refiner (*karkhanedar*).<sup>109</sup> But its production was widely dominated by usury-capital, though the direct intervention of the manufacturer was not as marked as in Rohilkhand.

### V. Advances and Appropriation

At the turn of the nineteenth century Gorakhpur division, accounting for 15.56 per cent of the province's cane acreage and 18.12 per cent of its raw sugar outturn and 29 per cent of its sugar production, figured prominently on the sugar map of U.P.<sup>110</sup> Within the region, it was in Azamgarh district that cane cultivation was highly integrated with sugar refining while the very reverse was true of Basti.<sup>111</sup> Gorakhpur district with half the total *gur* production devoted to sugar refining in the local *karkhanas*, but with a significant export of raw sugar to the refineries in neighbouring Azamgarh, Ballia and north Bihar districts, stood halfway between these two.<sup>112</sup>

*Gur* was collected at Padrauna, Shaibganj, Tiwaripatti, Patherdewa, Kasiya, Captainganj, Lar, Rampur *karkhana*, Barhaj Bazar and Pipraich in Gorakhpur district, and at Menhdawal, Dhani Bazar and Uska in Basti. All these except Rampur *karkhana* were collecting depots of grain as well. Some sugar refining took place at all these places, but the amenability of *gur* to long distance transport had helped in the growth of specialized refining centres in Gorakhpur. Barhaj, Rampur and Pipraich accounted for one-third of all the *karkhanas* situated in the district.<sup>113</sup> Of these Barhaj-Gaura with 51 *karkhanas* and Rampur with 42 were the two most important centres.

<sup>109</sup>Hadi, op. cit., pp. 67, 101-6; *Azamgarh SR, 1881*, para 445; *Khatauni Barhaj Bazar and Rampur Karkhana, c. 1885, 1912, Muhafiz-khana, Doria Collectorate*; Interviews in Rampur Karkhana, 10 Oct. 1976.

<sup>110</sup>Hadi, op. cit., pp. 108-11.

<sup>111</sup>*Azamgarh SR, 1881*, para 547 n; *NWP Gazetteer, 1881*, vol. VI, p. 696.

<sup>112</sup>G. Watt, op. cit., p. 161; *Ballia District Gazetteer, 1907*, p. 52.

<sup>113</sup>*Gorakhpur SR, 1891*, p. 73.

*Gur* was either hypothecated to the trader or sugar refiner below the market rate, or a high interest rate for the cash advance was charged if the market price was given. In the important cane-growing *pargana* of Mahul in Azamgarh district, interest on cash advances, which varied from 20 to 25 per cent for loans taken during the lean months of the agricultural year, were normally repaid in *gur*. It was reported in the 1870s that the *bania* lent sums of money to the needy peasants in autumn according to the area planned under cane. In the spring the peasant repaid the advance in *gur* calculated at the market rate, plus one-third or three-eighth for interest.<sup>114</sup> In Azamgarh district as a whole advances were invariably taken from the *mahajan* on a *sawai* (twenty-five per cent) rate of interest. The principal and the interest were repaid in *gur*, which was regularly undervalued and underweighed by the money-lender-trader. In a long and perceptive discussion, J.R. Reid, the settlement officer, describes the essential features of the *gur* advance system:

The *mahajan* is indispensable to the Azamgarh agriculturist for the latter's great money yielding crop is his sugarcane. His grain he keeps as much as he can to himself, and the indigo and poppy yield comparatively little cash to the general body of cultivators. But the agriculturist must and will spend money at other seasons than in which his sugarcane produce is ready; and that money he gets from his *mahajan*. If he were wise he would sell his sugar produce in the market for cash advantageously, and keep his money by him to spend as he needs. But poverty, habit and sentiment are too strong for him, and he remains the *mahajan's* constituent.

The rate of interest charged by the *mahajan* is nominally twenty-five per cent or *sawai*, but it is in fact a good deal more. Accounts are settled between him and his constituents in the summer or the autumn, usually after the refined sugar of the year has been disposed of. Any balance then struck in his favour, if not paid off, is debited as a fresh advance to his constituent. Upon it and upon cash payments made by him during the succeeding season he assesses interest at the rate of twenty-five per cent, credit of course being given by him at the same rate for the value of all produce made over to him by his constituent. The price rate, however, at which the *mahajan* values his constituent's sugar produce is not the full price rate of the open market at the time of its delivery. In that he makes a deduction of from five to ten percent and moreover he underweighs the produce at delivery considerably to

<sup>114</sup>Report on Pergunnah Mahoul, *Revenue Reporter*, vol. II, p. 176.

his own advantage. His weight is known in consequence as the *lagarhi panseri*. There are agriculturists of course who are able to sell their sugar produce in the open market, but they are probably themselves *mahajans* either *in esse* or *in posse*; and the great bulk of the agricultural population loses part of the value of its sugar produce in the manner above described.<sup>115</sup>

The situation was much the same in Gorakhpur district in the late nineteenth century. One of the *karkhanedars* reportedly informed the district officer that he did not care to deal with independent *gur* producers as he did not have 'the same hold over them as over cultivators who had bound themselves by taking his advances to grow a certain amount of cane'.<sup>116</sup> The collector found that in Deoria tehsil in 1880 'most of the men who had planted sugarcane had mortgaged the standing crop for seed and grain'. During the cold weather, as he 'marched through the tehsil', he saw 'at nearly every cane mill agents of the Barhay [Barhaj?] *mahajans* collecting the *gur*'.<sup>117</sup> This was not very different from the system in vogue in Rohilkhand. The only difference was that whereas the *khandsaris* set up their *bels* in the villages and made their own *raab* from the juice, in Gorakhpur the *karkhanedars* had no direct involvement with the process of *gur* manufacture. The Barhaj *karkhanedars* advanced money to cane growers in Silhat and Salempur Majhauili *parganas*, dealt with *bantias* and *arahtias* in distant *gur* collecting centres, had purchasing agencies at Gorakhpur, Menhdawal up the stream from the Rapti and at important *gur* marts like Captainganj, Kasia and Rudarpur.<sup>118</sup> (See map.)

At each stage in these transactions the *gur*-producing peasant was denied his legitimate share of the market price. The produce was hypothecated and bought at a rate below the market price, *gur* was regularly underweighed, and even the charge for the *karah* (boiling pan) that was hired by the peasant was pitched at a very high level.<sup>119</sup> Where cane cultivation and *gur* production took place

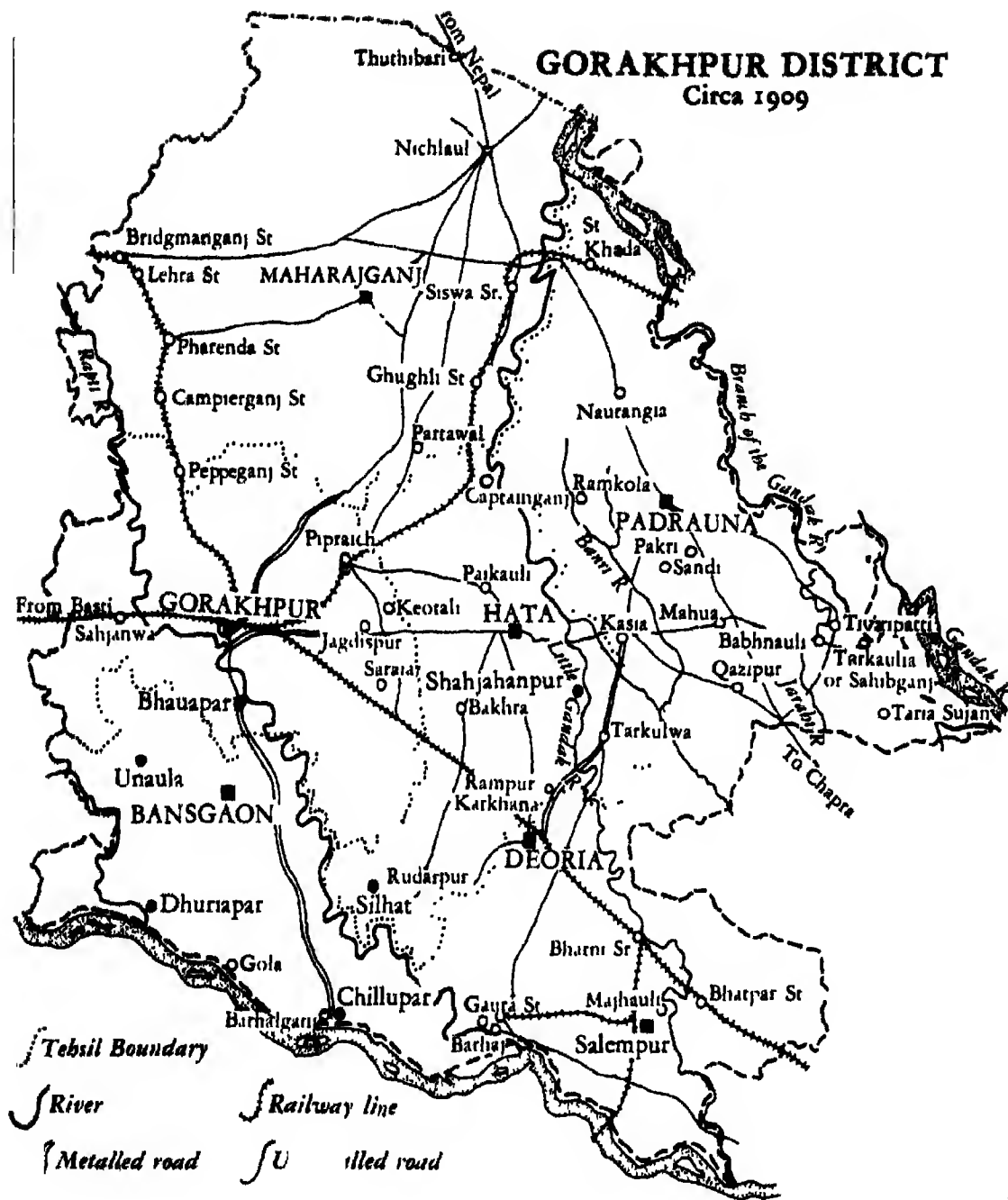
<sup>115</sup> Azamgarh SR, 1881, paras 495-6.

<sup>116</sup> NWP Gazetteer, 1881, vol. VI, p. 413.

<sup>117</sup> Cited in Parliamentary Papers, 1881, lxxi, pt 1, p. 281.

<sup>118</sup> NWP Gazetteer, 1881, vol. VI, p. 465; K.N. Singh, 'Barhaj: A Study in the Changing Pattern of a Market Town', *The National Geographical Journal of India*, vol. VII (1961), pp. 28-9.

<sup>119</sup> It was noted for Gorakhpur that the *karkh-nedar* 'takes an ample return for the advances he makes and for the hire of the *karahi*'. In Azamgarh in the 1870s the cost of the *karah* having a life span of eight years was Rs 15 to Rs 20. However, it was hired out to the peasants at a high rate—Rs 3 to Rs 6 per season. Cf. NWP Gazetteer, 1881, vol. VI, p. 413; Azamgarh SR, 1881, para 446.



within a complex system of indebtedness and dependence, all avenues—market price, rate of interest, weights and measures and hire of implements of production—were manipulated by money-lending traders and refiners to flush out this important commodity at as low a price as possible.<sup>120</sup>

<sup>120</sup>Similar methods were adopted in the Naini Tal tarai for the procurement of fine quality rice. Cf. Ashwani Saith, 'Agrarian Structure, Technology and Marketed Surplus in the Indian Economy', app. C (Cambridge Ph. D. thesis, 1978).

## VI 'Production Time' and Peasant Agriculture

At a general level, the ability of money-lender manufacturers to dominate *gur* production in such a comprehensive way was related to the specificities of small-peasant agriculture itself—the long duration of turnover and the combination of a long working period with an even longer production period.<sup>121</sup> By turnover we mean the time period which must elapse before the cycle of production can begin anew. In the case of peasant agriculture this relates to the completion of an entire harvest cycle connected with a given crop-rotation, rather than a mere succession of harvests. In north India the turnover was institutionalized in the *Fasli* (or harvest) year commencing with the month of *Kuar* or *Aswin* (mid-September-mid-October), after the early broadcast rice had been gathered. It was the Mughal emperor Akbar who made the agricultural year official by declaring 10 September 1555 to be the beginning of 963 *Fasli*, and since then the term *Fasli* has been applied 'to the era established with reference to the harvests of Hindustan'.<sup>122</sup> The British continued with the practice by superimposing their fiscal demand on to this agricultural year. Yet, despite the imposition of the revenue/rent demand on to an existing harvest year, small peasants invariably had to borrow to meet their dues. In other words there were in the long turnover of peasant agriculture certain weaker moments which were crucial to the ordering of the relationship between the small peasants and merchant money-lenders. We shall come to its specific manifestations in Gorakhpur in the next section. For the present it might be helpful at a general level to rethink this problematic in terms of Marx's observations on working time and production time as given in *Capital*, vol. II.

For Marx, 'working period' denoted 'the number of connected working-days required in a certain branch of industry for the manufacture of a finished product'.<sup>123</sup> Where the working period is long, successive layers of labour pile up on to the product: a continuous outlay of circulating capital (wages, raw material, etc.) is required, no part of which is in a form capable of circulation and

<sup>121</sup>The following discussion is based on chs. XII and XIII of Marx's *Capital*, vol. II (Moscow, 1957).

<sup>122</sup>J. Beames, *Supplementary Glossary of Indian Terms* (London, 1869), vol. II, p. 158; Asiya Siddiqi, *op.cit.*, p. 6; Grierson, p. 274.

<sup>123</sup>*Capital*, vol. II, p. 230.

<sup>124</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 231 ff.



hence of promoting a renewal of the same operation. Marx here draws the contrast between yarn manufacture, with a short working period, and the manufacture of a locomotive with a longer working period.<sup>124</sup>

Agriculture is characterized not just by a longer working period—the labour expended in the same operation (ploughing, weeding, watering) is spread over days and weeks; what is more important, it is also associated with an even longer production period. The production period consists of the working period plus a period during which the form of existence of the commodity (an unfinished product) 'is abandoned to the sway of natural processes, without being at that time in the labour process'.<sup>125</sup> Crops have their own life cycle and their growth and maturity cannot be expedited by a greater expenditure of labour in the fields, but must await 'natural processes', when the labour process is in abeyance. Thus 'unproductive labour' has to be somehow sustained over long periods of time. When the peasant can do no better than wait for the corn to take its time, he is in effect living either on his own saved up working capital, or, as was more often the case in India, on borrowed money and grain. Thus in agriculture 'we have a combination of both a longer working period and the great difference between working time and production time'.<sup>126</sup>

This relationship between the transformation of crops into commodities and what could be termed aspects of agricultural temporality, provided for Marx the backdrop for the operation of merchant-manufacturers:

. . . The divergence of the production period from the working period, the latter being but a part of the former, constitutes the natural basis for the combination of agriculture with subsidiary industries and . . . these subsidiary industries in turn offer points of vantage to the capitalist, who intrudes first in the person of the merchant.<sup>127</sup>

These remarks of Marx offered *apropos* the Russian countryside can be taken as points of departure for studying small-peasant commodity production as such. In India the existence of rural industry as auxiliary to agriculture and the operation of merchants through it is to be found in the familiar *dadan* system associated with textile production. What is often not realized is that the

<sup>124</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 231 ff.

<sup>125</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 239.

<sup>126</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 242.

<sup>127</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 241.

hiatus between production and working time, when accentuated by 'the necessity of securing ready money as soon as possible for instance to meet fixed obligations, such as taxes, ground rent, etc',<sup>128</sup> creates the space for the operation of money-lender manufacturers. These agents could be, as they were in India, as interested in cornering agro-products as in commodities produced by allied rural industries.

The case of sugarcane is still more interesting, for here the crop itself is converted into a commodity by being transformed through a village industry—*gur* or *raab* manufacture. The domination of the money-lender manufacturer is revealed in his control over raw sugar production. Where this remained a peasant activity this domination was manifested in the recouping of all loans at unfavourable rates in terms of *gur* and in various other ways of short-changing the *kisans*.<sup>129</sup> Where the domination of the money-lender manufacturer existed in its most developed form (e.g. in Rohilkhand) this resulted in a direct intervention, a virtual takeover of raw sugar production itself.<sup>130</sup>

In certain cases working time and even production time can be reduced by technological developments or a more elaborate division of labour. Thus, to quote Marx, 'mowers and threshers reduce the working period required to transform ripe grain into the finished product'.<sup>131</sup> But such improvements generally require a greater investment of fixed capital and/or an extension of cooperation. The speeding up of railway construction by mobilizing large gangs of labour and tackling the job simultaneously at several places falls into the category of shortening working time through an extension of cooperation.<sup>132</sup> Today, faster maturing grains can be cultivated, effectively reducing both the labouring time (working period) and the production time (the life-cycle of the plant). A fascinating example of such a process which caught Marx's attention was an innovation introduced by Bakewell, an English sheep farmer in the mid-nineteenth century. By careful selection Bakewell reduced the skeleton of the sheep to an absolute minimum, with the result that 'the breeder [could] now send three [sheep] to the market in the same space of time that it formerly took to prepare one'.<sup>133</sup> More developed high-speed 'breeders' can

<sup>128</sup>Ibid., p. 235.

<sup>129</sup>See above sec. V.

<sup>130</sup>See above sec. IV.

<sup>131</sup>*Capital*, vol. II, p. 234.

<sup>132</sup>Ibid., p. 235.

<sup>133</sup>Leonce de Lavergne, *The Rural Economy of England, Scotland and Ireland* (London, 1855), p. 20, cited in *ibid.*, p. 237.

turn out poultry at still faster rates in comparison with the time it took earlier to produce a chicken for the market.

What is interesting for us about Bakewell's New Leicesters (sheep) and today's 'factory chickens' is that in both cases the shortening of the turnover is effected by new dosages of technology and capitalization which do not leave the peasant or the farmer untouched. Under Bakewell's system the English sheep farmers moved on to the plane of capitalistic mode of production, while their more peasant counterparts across the channel—prisoners of the natural production time—could not make such a dramatic switch in the mid-nineteenth century. In India capitalist enterprises impinged on the peasants without absorbing them. When mechanized sugar mills came to dominate the cane market in Gorakhpur in the 1930s, no abbreviation of production time took place—as in the case of sheep and chicken farming in England; the constraints associated with a long production time continued, providing a structural basis for the domination of the peasantry by the sugar capitalists.<sup>134</sup>

It could be argued that in the case of Gorakhpur a quick succession of harvests should have lessened the smaller peasant's dependence on the *gur* trader/*karkhanedar*, a dependence which was associated with a crop having a very long span of 12 to 16 months for its production time. As we shall presently see, this was not the case. How and why did even multi-cropping, combined with the culture of high-valued cane, fail to lessen the dependence of the average Gorakhpuri peasant in actual practice? An answer to this question would require a closer look at the system and process of dependent production in the region in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

### VII Harvests, Cane and Qists

It is not being suggested that sugarcane was an unremunerative crop. Far from it. *Gur* grossed the largest 'income' per acre. Admittedly, for the peasantry of eastern U.P. in the late nineteenth century, sugarcane cultivation and *gur* manufacture were very important activities indeed. In Azamgarh district sugarcane in the 1870s occupied 11.9 per cent of the total cultivated area and the value of *gur* was 28.84 per cent of the total value of agricultural produce. The notional value of *gur* produce was either equal to or

<sup>134</sup>Cf. S. Amin, 'Sugarcane Cultivation'.

even a little higher than the attested rental of the important cane-growing tehsils of Gorakhpur district.<sup>135</sup> Clearly, if all the supposed profits from cane cultivation and *gur* manufacture were coming to the peasantry, there would not have been any need to take advances from *gur* traders and money-lenders for the payment of rent, etc. on such unfavourable terms.

At a general level, the low absolute size of the surplus remaining with the peasantry after the payment of rent may be taken to explain why the full market value of *gur* did not reach the pockets of the peasantry. Even in the inflationary period of World War I prices, illegal dues (*nazranas*) collected by the zamindars in addition to rent were substantial enough to materially reduce the peasants' profits from *gur*. During this period, according to the settlement officer, the average tenant in *bhat* lands in Padrauna tehsil could just about pay his rent from the sale of *gur*. In the more productive *bangar* tracts the situation was slightly better, but only, it seems, for the occupancy tenants. In northern Padrauna, the settlement officer in 1916 did not reckon debts to be serious, by which he meant that tenants generally owed less than the value of their sugarcane crop. However, in the same tract there were villages where the peasants were frequently indebted to the extent of two to three times the value of their *gur* produce.<sup>136</sup> It is interesting to note that despite the slump in *gur* prices in 1912-13 to unremunerative levels, the peasants of Padrauna were putting a large acreage under cane to raise the necessary cash for rent payment. The rice crop was kept for home consumption, and with poppy and indigo gone, wheat alternating with peas could not provide the wherewithal for meeting the *qists*.<sup>137</sup>

Far from leading to surplus accumulation, sugarcane cultivation in Gorakhpur barely enabled the majority of the peasants to reproduce their conditions of economic existence on a year to year basis. It was this importance of sugarcane as a cash-raising and debt-servicing crop, rather than its value as a surplus accumulator, that imbued it with a special role in the small-peasant economy of Gorakhpur in the late nineteenth century. The cane-growing peasant of Gorakhpur did not indulge in a monoculture, nor were his economic obligations exhausted by his relationship to the *gur*

<sup>135</sup>Azamgarh SR, 1881, app. VIII; Gorakhpur SR, 1891, pp. 152-60, 73.

<sup>136</sup>North Padrauna Rent Report, 1916, para 16; South Padrauna Rent Report, 1917, pp. 5-6.

<sup>137</sup>D.O. Commr, Gorakhpur, 18 April 1912, Rev. File 233 of 1912; Note dated 22 April 1912, Rev. File June 1912, KW, U.P. Archives, Lucknow.

trader cum sugar-refiner, or the payment of rent *after he had marketed his gur*. Fixed rental instalments had to be paid at particular times, foodgrains had to be procured during the lean months when stocks were depleted and cash raised and spent even when money was not at hand. The full significance of sugarcane in the peasant economy of Gorakhpur emerges only in the context of the short-term dynamic and the long-term sluggishness of the majority of the smaller peasant households. Excessive emphasis on the notional monetary returns from *gur*, or the relationship between the money-lender refiner and the peasant, can at best result in a partial understanding of the importance of sugarcane for the multi-crop raising small peasantry of Gorakhpur.

The principal crops grown in the Gorakhpur division were (1) *bhadai* (early *kharif*), consisting of *manrua* (*eleusine coracana*), *kodon* (*paspalum scrobiculatum*), *juar* (*holcus sorghum*), early broadcast rice and other inferior grains. These were sown in *Jeth-Asarh* (late May-early July) and harvested in *Bhadon-Kartik* (September-October); (2) *jarhan* or *aghani* (late) rice, which was transplanted in late June-early July and collected in late November-early December; (3) sugarcane, which was planted in March-April depending on the crop rotation and crushed from January to March; (4) *rabi*: some wheat, but basically gram and other inferior grains which were sown in *Kuar-Kartik* (late September-early November), cut in the middle and latter half of March, and threshed and stored in April-May.

The harvest calendar of the majority of the peasants was based on the above crops. In this system of *fasli* production the crucial role played by consumption loans, rental instalments and *gur* loans, to quote the settlement officer of Azamgarh, was as follows:

If the rice and the *rabi* crops of the preceding year had been good, the agriculturist has generally grain in his house; to feed—from April to the middle of August—himself and his family; and if he employs someone in watering his sugarcane, or in ploughing his land, to pay in kind for the hired labour. He may have rice to use as seed, but is not likely to have seed for the *rabi* crops, and will probably have to borrow in addition to the *rabi* seeds grain for food during September. When the *bhadai* crops are ready he is in need for grain for domestic use, and little or none of his crop will be sold. Through poor eating it will somehow carry him and his family on till the rice (*Aghani*) is cut and threshed. *Meanwhile he needs cash to pay the 1st and 2nd instalments of his*

rent, and this he borrows. When the rice crop is ready, he perhaps repays part of the money and grain he has borrowed. But rice is a favourite foodgrain, and it sells generally very cheap at harvest time. Besides the crop must supply food for himself and his family for three or four months at least. The cultivator therefore parts with as little of his crop as possible. Then comes the sugarcane season. *The price that he gets for his gur is set against his old debts for grain and cash and out of it he pays his rabi instalments, and his banker realizes debts that have been caused during the past year by marriages, domestic trouble and the like.* Out of his rabi grain the cultivator saves as much as he can but part of it he will have to sell in order to pay the last instalment of his rent, or square his account with his banker; for grain that he borrows the agriculturist pays in kind 37 per cent, for cash and grain repaid in cash, he pays interest at 25 per cent. The ordinary run of agriculturists lay by very little. Anything they might from adventitious circumstances—such as exceptionally good harvests, high prices, rent rates below average—be able to save, they spend in marriages and other petty extravagances. As a rule they live from hand to mouth, and probably always will do so.<sup>138</sup>

This long description of the season to season existence of the Azamgarh peasantry gives us some idea of the entrenched structure of dependence within which agricultural production took place. It is worth noting that the bulk of the two rice harvests was not sold but retained for domestic consumption. Throughout the nineteenth century, Azamgarh was in fact a net importer of foodgrains, but even in Gorakhpur, where rice was an important export earner, the early rice was kept by the peasants for domestic consumption. 'No tenant would allow his early rice crop to pass into other hands', commented the land records officer, explaining the reasons behind the peasants borrowing for the payment of the first *kharif* rental instalment.<sup>139</sup> This conscious choice of a particular cereal, which has led Fernand Braudel to 'venture the idea of a dietary choice by civilization', is of crucial relevance in estimating the cash-generating potential of peasant agriculture in eastern India. Braudel's remark that 'to stop cultivating rice [in Monsoon Asia] would be to lose caste',<sup>140</sup> may be intended as a literary flourish, but it should make one wary about imputing cash values to crops that were meant basically for domestic consumption. The

<sup>138</sup>S.O. Azamgarh to Bd. Revenue, 3 Aug. 1870, NWP Revenue A Progs, May 1873, no. 12, India Office Records. Cf. Whitcombe, op. cit., pp. 168-9 where this statement is also reproduced.

<sup>139</sup>Opinion of Kishan Chand, 7 July 1922, Rev. File 17 of 1922, Gorakhpur Record Room.

<sup>140</sup>Fernand Braudel, *Capitalism and Material Life, 1400-1800* (London, 1974), p. 103.

bulk of the early *kharif* was generally retained for food because it was intended as such. In any case the early *kharif* crops—*kodon*, *dhan*, *manrua* and *sanwan*— were all cheap grains, which if sold would not have yielded much cash, and would further have to be bought or borrowed at much higher prices or rates of interest in December-January.<sup>141</sup>

But even with the retention of the early *kharif*, food stocks were insufficient to enable the peasantry to do without grain loans, either for consumption or for seed requirements. *Bisar*—‘loan of seed upon stipulation of ample refund after harvest’—at a high *deorha* rate, was an institutionalization of a standard tendency for grain stocks to run short of peasant needs at crucial moments in the agricultural year. Seeds for the *rabi* crops had invariably to be borrowed, repayable at the next *rabi* harvest in grain at 50 per cent interest. Under this system of grain loans, even a 25 per cent rise in the price of *rabi* cereals did not really help the peasant in paying his interest and retaining a large enough surplus after meeting his *rabi* rental instalment. In case the peasant was unable to repay the grain and the price was high, the debt was commuted into cash with interest, which enhanced the burden for the following year. Describing this system in the 1880s, the settlement officer of Gorakhpur pithily remarked that ‘the load of debt rolls up and the creditor shifts the terms of the account from kind to cash as often as the state of the market requires it’.<sup>142</sup>

The *bisar* system was not an isolated phenomenon; it was symptomatic of the weak economic position of the peasantry and its inability to survive from harvest to harvest without losing a substantial portion of the market value of the crops, be they *rabi* grains or sugarcane. ‘We must remember’, stressed A. W. Cruickshank in his 1891 Gorakhpur settlement report, ‘that we can not argue as if the ordinary cultivator always started at any given time as a free agent . . . the very fact of the tenant being compelled to have recourse to the grain lender argues his initial want of

<sup>141</sup> U.P. Banking Committee, *Evidence*, vol. I, p. 187.

<sup>142</sup> Gorakhpur SR, 1891, p. 210. Cf. ‘Bisar’ in J. Beames, *Supplementary Glossary of Indian Terms*, vol. I, pp. 230-2. A village survey in Hardoi district in central U.P. in the 1920s revealed that roughly 70 per cent of the peasants had to take recourse to *behsar* during the *fashi* year. See Mukherjee (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 51. The analogous *bisahi* loan in Bahraich district was actually a cash advance on the crop, taken a month or two before the harvest for the payment of the *qist*. Cf. ‘Correspondence Relating to the Indebtedness of the Cultivators in Oudh’, in *Selections from the Records of Government (Oudh)*, 1868-69, pp. 52-3.

capital'.<sup>143</sup> A tenant unable to repay his grain loan, would be unable to possess the reserves to meet other cash requirements like rental dues, expenditure for cane cultivation and various ceremonial expenses on marriages, deaths and the like.

Where the bulk of the early *kharif* was kept for home consumption, loans had to be raised for the payment of the first *kharif qist* (rent instalment), which fell in November with local variations. This connection was very explicit in the case of Rohilkhand. As soon as the agreement between the peasant and the *khandsari* was concluded in September-October, the cultivator received Rs 5 per *kutchā bigha* in cash, and a promissory note for the remainder to be paid when his November, December and February instalments of rent fell due.<sup>144</sup> *Apropos* this system in Shahjahanpur, a knowledgeable official reported in 1870:

The rent is often received by the landlord in the autumn, some *six months before the cane is cut*, the time when the tenant receives the greater part of the advances on the crop from the manufacturer. In fact the rent is, for his own security, commonly paid by the manufacturer direct to the landlord, and deducted from the advance to be paid to the cultivator; thus the landlord, though not necessarily himself a manufacturer, has an interest in encouraging the cultivation. By this custom the tenant has to borrow in order to pay rent six months before he can receive any return by sale of the produce.<sup>145</sup>

Our discussion of the harvest calendar of the Azamgarh peasantry and the dealings of the *mahajan* suggest a similar connection,<sup>146</sup> though not in the extreme form met with in Rohilkhand.

It might seem that I am presenting the *décalage* between the seasonality of peasant production and that of cash obligations and stock of foodgrains as a necessary and sufficient condition for the system of cash crop cultivation based on usury. It could however be argued that if productivity was double, or if rents were half of what they were, then theoretically there would seem to be no reason for the peasants to pay high rates of interest or lose a portion of the market value of their cash crops by taking loans for payment of rental instalments.<sup>147</sup> But the universe within which

<sup>143</sup>Gorakhpur SR, 1891, p. 210.

<sup>144</sup>Bareilly SR, 1874, p. 95.

<sup>145</sup>G. Butt, 'Sugarcane in Shahjahanpur', in *Revenue Reporters*, vol. III, p. 123.

<sup>146</sup>See above.

<sup>147</sup>Even in labour scarcity situations, where rents were sub-maximal, indebted tenants could lose a growing portion of the benefits of high value crops to landlords and traders. For



this *décalage* between the peasantry's 'liabilities and assets' proved detrimental to their interests was one dominated by low levels of income and a pervasive rule of property in land. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century the cane-growing peasant was losing a portion of the market value of his crop to the *gur* trader-sugar refiner because, among other things, he had to pay his rent instalment to the landlord when the *qists* fell due. When during the 1930s a doubling of cane acreage took place in response to the demands of the sugar mills, landlords and money-lenders were still able to mediate between the peasants and the sugar capitalists.<sup>148</sup> In a world dominated by consumption loans, seed loans and rental loans, the rigid enforcement of the quarterly system of *qist* payment by the colonial regime assumed a force of its own.

Where a market for cash crops was not sufficiently developed, as in tehsil Khalilabad in Basti district, the system of *potai* (from *pot*: rent) loans indicated that the peasantry was again unable to meet its obligations without recourse to a usurious system of credit. Commenting on the financial position of peasants in *tappas* Menhdawal, Bakhira and Utrawal in Basti district, E. A. H. Blunt, the settlement officer, observed in 1917:

He is deep in debt usually to his own landlord. He is in the habit of borrowing money for seed, for his rent, even for his subsistence. All these loans carry 25 per cent interest, and the interest forms the first charge on the ensuing crop. A tenant for instance takes *potai* rent loan at *kharif*—a mere book transaction of course, for the creditor is his own landlord. At the ensuing *kharif* he pays his *rabi* instalment, and so on. By means of these *potai* loans, in fact the tenant pays a more or less permanent enhancement of 25 per cent on his recorded rent.<sup>149</sup> (Emphasis added)

An interesting case; for here the peasants were burdened with a further enhancement of their rents through payment of interest to landlords for 'rent loans' which were never really given to them. The zamindars of tehsil Khalilabad were insisting on their property rights in a curious fashion: no loan was actually advanced but the peasants had in effect to pay 25 per cent interest on the *kharif qist*

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a case study of the Naini Tal tarai region, see Ashwani Saith, *op. cit.* app. C, cited in note 120.

<sup>148</sup>Cf. Amin, 'From the Field to the Factory'.

<sup>149</sup>*Pargana Maghar East Rent-Rate Report, District Basti, 1917*, para 21.

because they could not pay it on time. The date of the *bebaq* (final balancing) fell at the end of September for revenue purposes, and the zamindars were supposed to clear off their revenue obligations by that date. But for the tenants the actual *qists* were very real indeed; either they had to raise money carrying a high rate of interest or their crops were hypothecated. Where such was not the case the rent due itself carried a 25 per cent rate of interest. Where a market for *gur* existed the loans were to be repaid in *gur* at a disadvantageous rate.

The revenue *qists* in Gorakhpur had been fixed in the 1880s for the 15th November, 15th January, 1st May and 1st June. At the 1916 settlement the May and June *qists* were amalgamated into one in June, but the *dasturdehis* of *mauzas* like Rampur *karkhana* still mentioned the old quarterly system of revenue collection. But what is perhaps more important than the resistance at the village level to changes introduced by the Board of Revenue is the fact that the rents of tenants fell due three to four weeks before the dates of the revenue *qists*. The *dasturdehis* of individual *mauzas* made no mention of separate rent *qists*, but maintained nevertheless that occupancy tenants (*dakhilkars*) had to pay their rents 21 days and the non-occupancy tenants (*ghair-dakhilkars*) 30 days before the revenue *qists*.<sup>150</sup> This was no doubt meant to give the zamindars sufficient time to realize their rents, but it also showed that the government was in collusion with the landlords in asking for cash payments from the weaker sections of the peasantry at a time when peasant agriculture was incapable of generating a cash surplus. This was a case of private property in land impinging through the mechanism of rent on the very basis of peasant agriculture: rents in cash were demanded when there were no agricultural commodities at hand; crops were consequently hypothecated as the *qist* had to be paid whatever the cost.

No *kharif* crop in the district was ready by the middle of October, or if ripe, harvested and sold by that date to enable peasants to pay their early *kharif* due by the second or third week of October. Early rice was no doubt ripe by mid-October but most of it, as already pointed out was coarse and cheap grain, kept by the peasants for home consumption. Those who sold it had to convert

<sup>150</sup> 'Wajih-ul-arz' and 'Dasturdehi', *mauza* Rampur, *tappa* Patna, *tehsil* Deoria, 1323 *Fasli*, *Muhafizkhana*, Deoria Collectorate; Revising Officer Gorakhpur to Bd. Revenue, 14 Nov. 1940, Rev. File I-H/I of 1940, Gorakhpur Record Room.

*dhan* (rice in husk) into *chawal* (clean rice), which was not brought to the market before the middle of November. The late rice crop—*jarhan* or *aghani*—was not harvested till the end of November and was not a commodity ready to enter the market until the beginning of December. Sugarcane was also ripe by the middle of November or early December, but in some cases the preparation of *gur* did not commence till late January; the peasants waiting for the crop to be fully mature, and also taking time off to finish their *rabi* sowings. Caught up between the imperatives of their harvest calendar and the pressing demand for prompt payment of rental on pain of being sued for default and/or ejected from tenancy, the small peasants fell back on the cash-raising potential of their sugarcane. In Hata, Gorakhpur, Padrauna and Deoria tehsils, where sugarcane was an important crop, they continued to raise loans on the security of their cane fields in the 1920s, just as they had done in the 1870s and 1880s. Money was willingly advanced by the *gur* trader and the sugar refiner at high rates of interest to enable the peasant to meet his *qists*, and *gur* was pledged in return.<sup>151</sup> As long as *gur* remained the predominant commodity form of sugarcane, right down to the 1920s, the *gurai* loan survived.

But why did the colonial state not mitigate the rigours of the *qists* by giving the peasants, as it were, some breathing time in this regard. The question had arisen intermittently during the nineteenth century, only to be blocked by the financial expediency of the government. Without going into the details of the arguments,<sup>152</sup> I shall just concentrate on showing how the specific question of altering the *qists* in Gorakhpur was dealt with by the U.P. government in the early twentieth century. The episode is of more than marginal interest, for some of the officials who had noticed the problem of *qists* while in the field revealed a different perspective when put in charge of provincial finance at the Lucknow secretariat.

A resolution was introduced in the legislative council in 1922 by Ajodhya Das, a liberal barrister of Gorakhpur, to amalgamate the November and December revenue *qists* into one in January, and

<sup>151</sup>Resolution re: Alteration of Payment of Land Revenue by Mr Ajodhya Das of Gorakhpur, *Procs of the Legislative Council of the United Provinces*, vol VIII (1922), pp. 436, 439; Opinion of Land Records Officer, 7 July 1922, Rev File 17 of 1922, Gorakhpur Record Room.

<sup>152</sup>Cf. Siddiqi, *op. cit.*, pp. 124-39; Whitcombe, *op. cit.*, pp. 155-60.

thus bring harvests and rental payments in accord with one another. Despite some support from local officialdom the resolution fell through. In defence of the established arrangement a high-ranking bureaucrat in the U.P. secretariat noted that the 'reasons for postponing the kharif kist would apply equally to the rent kist, the postponement of which the zamindars may not appreciate'.<sup>153</sup> For the landlords the lien on the peasants' crops effectively built into the system of early *kharif qists* was yet another institutional factor which helped their domination of the peasantry. It was reported from a Basti village in the 1920s that the tenants borrowed for the first and the second *kharif qists* 'as the zamindar is hostile and may bring a suit'.<sup>154</sup> No wonder the Commissioner of Gorakhpur reported that there was little desire on the part of the 'revenue paying public' for any alteration in *qists*.<sup>155</sup>

Even E. A. H. Blunt, who just five years earlier had analysed so well the problems that the early *kharif qist* posed for the Basti peasantry,<sup>156</sup> took a very different stance when as finance secretary he was faced with the same question in 1921. He was against any changes in the *qist* system of Gorakhpur as it would affect, he thought, the quarterly system of budgeting. The revenue of the province came in large sums only at certain periods, and the flow was reduced to a trickle for about six months in the year. During this period the Central Government supplied the province with ready cash from its general all-India balances to keep the government machinery functioning. A postponement of the early *kharif* due from mid-November to mid-January would, if applied to the entire province, withhold something like one crore rupees from the provincial exchequer for two months, thus forcing it to borrow from the centre. This sudden demand could upset the Government of India's ways and means estimates, and the centre would have to raise the one crore for U.P. by issuing treasury bills at 97 per. cent par for three months. A postponement of the mid-November *qist*, Blunt concluded, 'would hit the Government of India to the tune of 3 lakhs. It would not, of course, hurt the provincial exchequer directly, but every bit of expenditure that the Government of India would have to incur postpones and

<sup>153</sup>Note by G. B. Muir, 18 July 1921, Rev. File 301 of 1921, U.P. Archives, Lucknow.

<sup>154</sup>U.P. Banking Committee, Evidence, vol. II, p. 187.

<sup>155</sup>Commr., Gorakhpur's opinion cited in Note by S.H. Fremantle, 18 Oct., 1922, Rev. File 301 of 1921, U.P. Archives, Lucknow.

<sup>156</sup>See above, p. 82.

reduces the decrease of their deficit and consequently of our contribution, so that we are hurt indirectly'<sup>157</sup> The interests of the landlords and the state reigned supreme. The financial expediency of the government and the power the early *khanf qist* allowed the landlord to exercise over their tenants, had combined once again to provide, as they had in the 1870s, an additional factor to the general indebtedness of the peasantry.<sup>158</sup> The production of cash crops for exchange below market rates was inextricably linked to it.

It is in the context of this complex relationship between the peasantry and their harvest cycle—the low absolute size of cash income, the recourse to seasonal borrowing to meet the requirement of foodgrains, seed and cash for rent, and the general dependence on the dominant classes in the village—that the system of cane cultivation based on advances had its true rationale from the point of view of the peasantry. The function of money as a means of payment on a particular date was the vantage point for the penetration of usurious capital.<sup>159</sup> Where the holdings were small and incomes low, as in Gorakhpur, the reliance on usurious loans for the timely payment of *qists* was very real indeed.

The *gur* trader and the sugar refiner, either directly or with the help of local money-lenders, were able to secure *gur* from the peasantry at cheap rates and to do so not simply because they dominated the market. No doubt the cane-growing peasant hypothecated his *gur* under terms and conditions laid down when the loan was offered in October–November in the first instance. But the peasants accepted the usurious terms, because their subordination to the landlord, accentuated by the peculiarities of the harvest calendar and the need to pay the early *khanf* dues was such that loans had to be raised at the right time, whatever the price. The element of 'unequal exchange' between the peasant *gur* producer and the *gur* appropriator was fairly clear. But this relationship between the small peasant commodity producer and the

<sup>157</sup>Note by F A H Blunt, Finance Member, 21 July 1921, Rev. File 301 of 1921, U P Archives, Lucknow.

<sup>158</sup>Whitcombe op cit p 159.

<sup>159</sup>Cf Marx: 'The really important and characteristic domain of the usurer however is the function of money as a means of payment. Every payment of money—ground rent, tribute, tax, etc. which becomes due on a particular date carries with it the need to secure money for such a purpose. Hence from the days of the ancient Rome to modern times, wholesale usury relies upon the tax collectors, *fermiers généraux*, *receveurs généraux*.' *Capital*, vol III, p 599. For a stimulating discussion of the link of usury to the rhythms of peasant agriculture, see R H Tawney op cit pp 19–27.

usurer, whether manufacturer or trader, cannot be explained in isolation from other factors. Here indeed is an instance of usury-capital dominating a system of petty-commodity production. But it needs emphasizing that in the case of *gur* manufacture in Gorakhpur, there was a *very genuine peasant basis* for the petty-commodity production which is crucial to our understanding of the character of this domination.

We would suggest that while this conclusion would tend to have some general validity, the specific elements that have been isolated here may vary in their significance from region to region. If, for instance, the experience of the cotton-growing peasantry of Broach in Gujarat may seem to diverge from the pattern outlined above, it is perhaps because rather different conditions prevailed in that region after the cotton boom of the 1860s. The *qist* phenomenon was unimportant here<sup>160</sup> because like the 'wet' districts of Madras an independent peasantry had emerged in a big way by the last quarter of the nineteenth century. This essay does not offer a rigid mould in which to cast all peasant experiences; but aims rather at suggesting that our analytical frameworks should be moulded by these experiences themselves.

However, it should be clear from this discussion that no serious student of small-peasant commodity production can ignore such critical questions as the timing of the harvests, the dates when money was generally needed and rents fell due. A historian of the peasantry who forsakes the *nakshatras* for the trader's grain pit is likely to fail in his/her understanding not only of the peasant but also of the merchant money-lender, for the latter had a very good idea of the timings of his transactions:

The dealers who collected saffron in the Abruzzi mountains [in the 15th century] on behalf of the great Nuremberg merchants knew this well: they timed their visits for February, the very moment when the villagers had not only to scrape together to pay for the transhumance of their flocks to Apulia, but also when they had to discharge the royal *taille*.<sup>161</sup>

Nearer home in Gorakhpur, indebtedness and commodity production proceeded along the paths charted by the exigencies of agricultural temporalities.

<sup>160</sup>Cf. Shri Prakash, 'Towards Alternative Models of Commercialisation in a "Colonial" Economy: A Study of Peasant Economy in the Broach District in Late Nineteenth Century' (M. Phil. thesis, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 1979).

<sup>161</sup>G. Duby, *op. cit.*, p. 347.

# Rebellious Hillmen: The Gudem- Rampa Risings 1839-1924

DAVID ARNOLD

If the names 'Gudem' and 'Rampa' have any meaning for the historian of modern India it may be recalled that they are hill tracts, located near the Godavari River in Andhra Pradesh, and that they acquired a brief prominence in the early 1920s because of a rising there. Existing historiography has nothing further to add, and only M. Venkatarangaiya in a collection of documents on the freedom movement in Andhra has described and attempted to explain the 1922-4 rising (or *fituri*).<sup>1</sup> Even he seems largely unaware that this was merely the last in a long series of disturbances and rebellions in the hills which stretch back at least to the early nineteenth century and possibly earlier.

This neglect need not surprise us. It is an indication not that there was anything peculiarly obscure about these tracts or trivial about their history but of the prevailing state of the historiography of modern India. Conventional academic wisdom about the sub-continent stresses (especially by contrast with China's massive peasant revolts and twentieth-century revolutions) fatalism and passivity, corruption and self-seeking, resignation in the face of hardship and oppression. Violent conflict is rarely seen to have been of importance—after the Mutiny and Rebellion of 1857 it is allowed significance only in the communal rioting that preceded and accompanied Partition in 1947 and in the terrorist sub-plot to the Gandhi-dominated saga of India's nationalist movement. Equally, conventional historiography has been too busy searching for what are presumed to be the grand, overarching themes of modern Indian History to concern itself greatly with the attitudes

<sup>1</sup>M. Venkatarangaiya (ed.), *The Freedom Movement in Andhra Pradesh, Volume III, 1921-31* (Hyderabad, 1965)

and activities of the peasants who constituted the great majority of the population. Peasants appear as the victims of history, not as its principals. They have revenue systems imposed upon them, they are invaded by the modern state, they are harangued and mobilized by the nationalist orator and activist. Rarely do they enter the pages of modern Indian history in their own right, motivated by their own interests, giving voice to their own grievances.<sup>2</sup> Little wonder, then, that the rebellious peasants of Gudem and Rampa, tucked away in a remote corner of the Eastern Ghats, have received no more than a cursory glance.

Quite apart from the intrinsic interest of any area of persistent disturbances and risings, Gudem and Rampa demonstrate two fundamental characteristics of subalternity in India (and perhaps in peasant societies generally). The precise forms that these took were, no doubt, moulded by the physical environment of the hills and by that almost universal antipathy which hillmen feel towards the inhabitants of the plains. But far from detracting from the basic similarity between these peasant movements and others, such factors often serve to dramatize and to highlight developments that occurred more gradually, were less starkly illuminated, in the plains.

In the first characteristic manifestation of subalternity, the inhabitants of the hill tracts were opposed to outsiders who threatened their territory and their customary ways of life. The outsiders were of several kinds—British colonial administrators, their Indian troops, police and civilian subordinates, Telugu traders and contractors moving up from the coastal plain. But this diversity did not weaken the hillman's conviction that they conspired together and had a mutual interest in oppressing and exploiting him. In the cause of resisting external interference and control, the local elite—composed of members of the zamindari and mansabdari families and their subordinate chiefs (or *muttadars*)—took a leading part, with varying degrees of popular support. As outside intervention increased in scale and intensity, and as the threat to

<sup>2</sup>For some extreme statements of these views, see Barrington Moore Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Harmondsworth, 1973), esp. pp. 202, 330-41, 378-85; Thomas R. Metcalf, 'Social Effects of British Land Policy in Oudh', in Robert Eric Frykenberg (ed.), *Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History* (Madison, 1969), pp. 145-6; Christopher Baker, 'Non-cooperation in South India', in C. J. Baker and D. A. Washbrook (eds.), *South India: Political Institutions and Political Change, 1880-1940* (Delhi, 1975), pp. 98-149.



the hillmen's old ways grew, resistance came more and more from the peasants, though with leaders recruited (sometimes under threat of violence) from the fragmented elite. It was this long-established hostility to outsiders that the rebel leader Sita Rama Raju tried to mobilize in the 1922-4 *fituri* in the cause of Indian nationalism. Xenophobia and peasant territoriality were thus pressed into service for a wider cause in the Gudem-Rampa hills as they have repeatedly been by nationalist and communist movements in the modern world.<sup>3</sup>

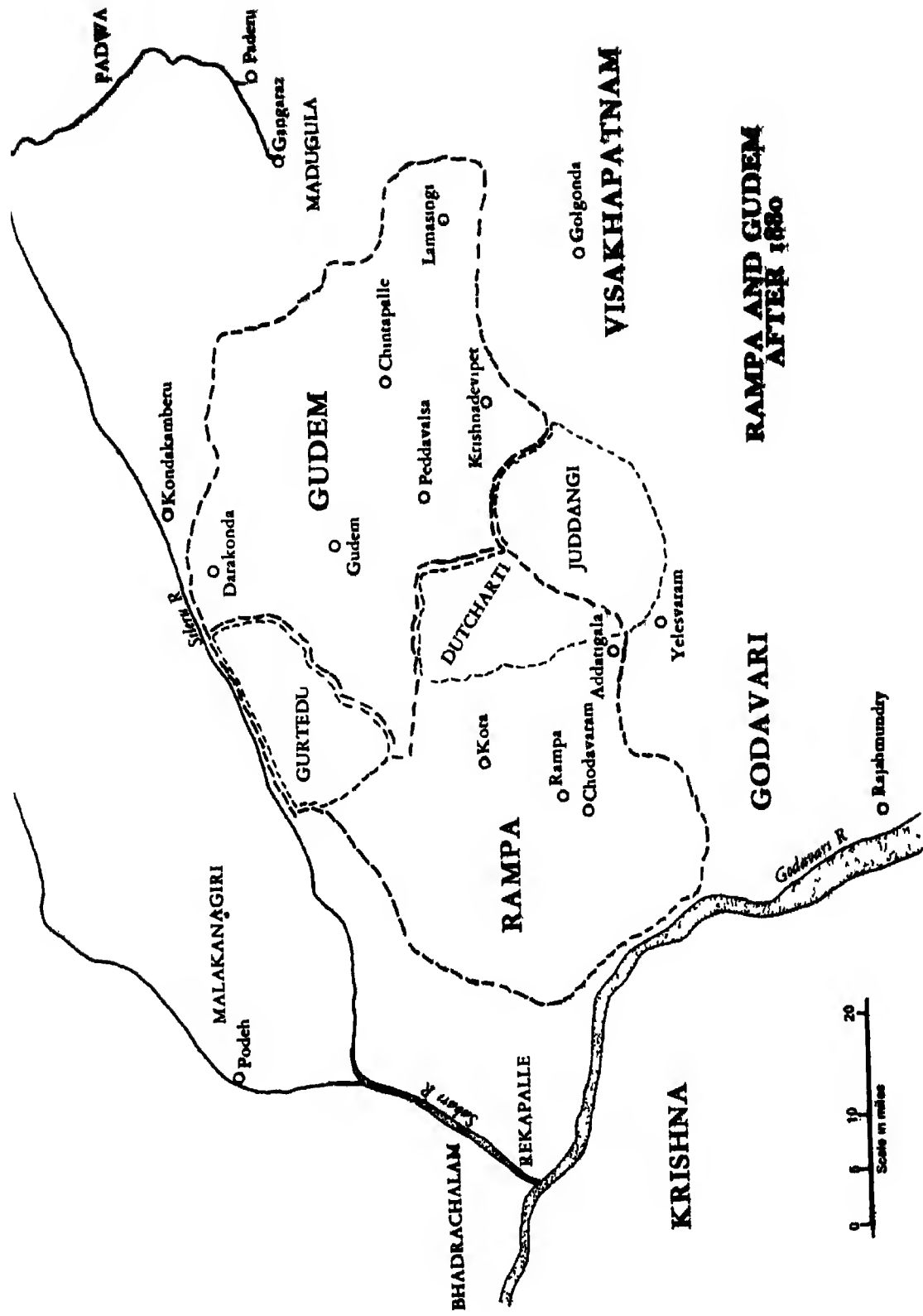
In the second characteristic of subalternity, the hillmen were themselves divided. On one side were the local élite with their superior wealth, social status and political influence: on the other the peasantry. This relationship was one of profound ambiguity and great social and cultural complexity. To summarize it crudely, for much of their lives the poorer villagers paid their lords the taxes and fees, the respect, the deference, and the social obligations, that were customary or necessary for survival. In return, hopefully, they received protection, help and security. But this relationship did not reduce the peasants to mute and unquestioning obedience, nor did it rob them of the capacity for initiative and self-expression, though like peasants elsewhere they would prefer to till their land and leave the business of fighting and negotiating with higher authority to those better qualified. Peasant resentment against excessive taxation might be expressed by migrating elsewhere or by open revolt; peasants might coerce a lord who was slow to move on his own account into leading their opposition to outsiders. This ambiguous relationship was further complicated in the Gudem-Rampa hills by the relative poverty and backwardness of the area which tended to limit the degree of socio-economic differentiation that was possible and, at least in the earlier part of our period, to keep the *muttadars* close to their villages. Hence, the lines of division were not always clearly drawn, especially when remoter members of *muttadari* families or dispossessed *muttadars* and their descendents were drawn back into the peasant mass. Nonetheless, in this internal tension and conflict within hill society one can see the seeds of the development of rural class identity and class conflict.

<sup>3</sup>The classic case of this would appear to be China during the Second World War: see Chalmers A. Johnson, *Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power: The Emergence of Revolutionary China* (Stanford, 1962). The prominence Johnson gives to 'peasant nationalism' as a factor in the communists' success has been extensively criticized but not altogether denied.

### *The Hills and the Hillmen*

Between the Godavari and Mahanadi rivers the Eastern Ghats rise steeply from the plains of coastal Andhra and Orissa. The contrast is stark. Below the ghats fertile soils, irrigation and centuries of settled agriculture have contributed to making the lowlands one of the most densely populated areas of southern India. Roads, villages and market towns abound; the Madras-Calcutta railway saunters through. Above the ghat, at altitudes from 1,500 to nearly 5,000 feet, lies a jumble of hills and plateaus merging distantly into Bastar and the northern Deccan. Dispersed in settlements along the river valleys and in jungle clearings lives a small population. There are few towns and metalled roads; until relatively recently shifting cultivation was the dominant form of agriculture.

Outside administrators have long partitioned these hills. Under British rule the bulk of the uplands (some 20,000 square miles) was incorporated in the north-eastern districts of the Madras Presidency. They formed the Agency subdivisions of Ganjam, Visakhapatnam and Godavari (formerly Rajahmundry) districts with the Collector-Magistrate acting as Agent and directing a virtually separate administration for the hills. From December 1920 until 1923 the three agencies were combined under a single Commissioner: this decision was reversed partly for reasons of economy, partly because the colonial lines of communication ran not between hill tracts but between each tract and the plains below. The rest of the uplands, the areas to the west and north, were allotted to Bastar, the Central Provinces and Orissa. In 1956 the colonial boundaries were superseded by the creation of linguistic states in southern India, and the hills were partitioned anew, this time between Andhra and Orissa. But despite the divisions imposed on the area by outsiders, it has a unity of its own that is more than topographical. Many hillmen belonged to the Gond family of tribals (*adivasis*) and spoke, with extensive Telugu and Oriya borrowings, the Kui language. Their social and religious practices, though greatly influenced from outside, yet possessed distinctive features. Although social anthropologists have emphasized the isolation of these hill communities, one from another, to a historian of popular movements it is striking how much communication was possible between hillmen scattered over this vast area—and how rapidly a *fituri* begun in one locality could spread to



**RAMPA AND GUEDEM  
AFTER 1880**

**KRISHNA**

**GODAVARI**

**VISAKHAPATNAM**



neighbouring tracts. Although Gudem and Rampa had territorial identities of their own, many of the sites sacred to their inhabitants lay outside the tracts, and there is evidence, too, of contacts with hillmen in adjacent areas. It would seem, in fact, that the whole southern and eastern arc of the uplands—from the Godavari to the hills of Madugula—constituted the broader territory with which the Gudem-Rampa hillmen identified themselves.<sup>4</sup>

Who were the hillmen? There is a perplexing variety of answers. In 1847 the Agent for Visakhapatnam claimed that there were no hill tribes at all in Gudem, only a small population which was of 'pure Hindu race'.<sup>5</sup> Writing almost a century later, C. von Fürer-Haimendorf took a diametrically opposite view, asserting that both the principal hill communities in Rampa (whom he identified as the Koyas and the Hill Reddis or Konda Bagtals) were tribals. He maintains that the so-called Hill Reddis are not related to the Reddi or Kapu castes of Telugu peasants and that the name 'Reddi' may have become attached to them solely because they were subject to the Reddi kings of Rajahmundry in the fourteenth century. Throughout his monograph Fürer-Haimendorf insists on the primitiveness of the Hill Reddis. Their physical features, their food-gathering and shifting cultivation, their 'simplemindedness' and gullibility in dealing with plainsmen, their 'unimaginative and unspiritual' mentality—all are adduced to demonstrate the Hill Reddis' extreme backwardness. The Koyas, by comparison, are pronounced to be 'progressive' and 'dynamic'. Fürer-Haimendorf records the claims of some Hill Reddis to be immigrants from the plains and distinct from the indigenous population, but he is reluctant to accept such claims and holds to his conclusion that the Rampa Reddis are essentially the same primitive tribe that he had found in the hills to the north and along the banks of the Godavari in Hyderabad.<sup>6</sup>

A more satisfactory identification of the hillmen is to be found in the colonial administrators' reports and gazetteers, and in Edgar Thurston's *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*. From these sources it

<sup>4</sup>For a social anthropologist's account of village society in the Oriya-dominated Kondmals at the north-eastern end of the hills, see F. G. Bailey, *Caste and the Economic Frontier: A Village in Highland Orissa* (Manchester, 1957).

<sup>5</sup>Agent to Sec., Jud., 23 Oct. 1847, Madras Judicial Proceedings (hereafter MJP), no. 5, 7 Dec. 1847, India Office Library, London (IOL). Apart from footnote 122, all archival materials used in this essay are located at the IOL.

<sup>6</sup>Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf, *The Reddis of the Bison Hills: A Study in Acculturation* (London, 1945), pp. 8-10, 28, 35-46, 164-76, 239.

appears that the Reddis of Rampa and Gudem were Bagatas or Bhaktas, a caste of Telugu-speaking freshwater fishermen and cultivators, said to be distantly related to the Kapu and Telaga peasant castes. Thurston notes that in Madugula and in the Golgonda zamindari (which encompassed the Gudem hills) the Bagatas were accorded a privileged position. Here their name was reputedly derived from *bhakti* (in acknowledgement of their special devotion to the local rulers) and in return for their services they had received land grants as *mokhasadars* (holders of individual villages) or were appointed village headmen (*padals*).<sup>7</sup> Elsewhere, in confirmation of this view, Bagatas are described as 'lords of the hills' and as long-established immigrants from the plains, who constituted all, or almost all, of the *muttadars* in Gudem and Rampa.<sup>8</sup>

About the Koyas' identity there is no dispute. By all accounts they were a branch of the Gond *adivasis*, spoke the Kui language, and shared many Gond social and religious customs.<sup>9</sup> But a third hill community, the Konda Doras, is also mentioned in some sources and its composition is as problematic as that of the Hill Reddis. Their name means in Telugu 'lords of the hills', and it seems that they constituted the bulk of those whom Fűrrer-Haimendorf calls Hill Reddis but confuses with Bagatas. The Konda Doras might have been a section of the Gonds, more Teluguized in speech and social behaviour than the Koyas; they might even have been the offspring of Bagata-Koya miscegenation. Fűrrer-Haimendorf himself observed a great variety of physical appearance among those whom he labelled Hill Reddis and noted that sexual relations between Reddis and other communities, though never legalized by marriage, had undoubtedly left their mark on the racial composition of the tribe. Bagata *muttadars* and headmen took Koya and Konda Dora wives as well as concubines and Fűrrer-Haimendorf himself cites a case, perhaps not as rare as he assumes, in which a Bagata *muttadar* had a Konda Dora mother.<sup>10</sup> It is noticeable, however, that administrators rarely referred to both Koyas and Konda Doras in the same report, and it

<sup>7</sup>Edgar Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India* (Madras, 1909), I, pp. 128-30.

<sup>8</sup>Head Asst. Agent, Narsipatnam, to Agent, Visakhapatnam, 30 May 1901, G(overnment) O(rder) 1371, Jdl., 2 Sept. 1901; Agent, Visakhapatnam, to Chief Sec., 17 Oct. 1886, G.O. 3080, Jdl., 18 Nov. 1886.

<sup>9</sup>Thurston, *Castes and Tribes*, III, pp. 356-415; IV, pp. 37-74.

<sup>10</sup>Fűrrer-Haimendorf, *op. cit.*, pp. 37, 172.

has been suggested that they were essentially the same *adivasi* community, distinguishable, if at all, only by the Konda Doras' greater degree of Teluguization.<sup>11</sup> In this essay the names used in the sources will be followed.

Alongside these main communities, and in far smaller numbers, were other hillmen. Kammars, prominent in several of the risings, were blacksmiths by caste, but often practising cultivation as well. According to Fűrer-Haimendorf they had 'close affinities' with the Konda Doras, but held a social position inferior to both them and the Koyas.<sup>12</sup> Two kinds of priests are mentioned. The Jangams were Lingayats particularly associated with the Saivite *muttadars* and Bagata headmen. Fűrer-Haimendorf thought that they were probably relatively recent immigrants and believed that they intermarried with *muttadari* families.<sup>13</sup> Accounts of the 1886 rising in Gudem also refer to a group of priests known as Sivasaris drawn from the Konda Doras, but we have been unable to find any other reference to them.

Traditionally, three factors linked these hill communities together into a single, albeit loosely articulated, peasant society—a largely self-sufficient economy based on shifting cultivation, shared religious beliefs, and the overarching *muttadari* system.

With the exception of the *muttadars* and perhaps a few headmen, smiths, and priests, all the hillmen were cultivators and depended upon agriculture for their subsistence. Although their diet was supplemented by collecting fruits, nuts, roots and honey, and by liquor tapped from palmyra and sago palms, their principal source of food was the cultivation of millets, pulses and root crops in jungle clearings. The customary form of agriculture was *podu* (shifting or swidden cultivation).<sup>14</sup> A hillman, sometimes in association with a close relative, chose a patch of jungle and cleared it during the dry season by felling the trees and burning off as much of the vegetation as possible. In the absence of ploughs, the hillman broadcast the grain on roughly hoed earth or dibbled it into the ground with a stick. After two or three years, when the producti-

<sup>11</sup>E.g., Francis, cited in Thurston, *Castes and Tribes*, III. p. 351.

<sup>12</sup>Fűrer-Haimendorf, *op. cit.*, pp. 243-5.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 252-3; Thurston, *Castes and Tribes*, I, p. 130; II, pp. 450-1.

<sup>14</sup>For an excellent account of *podu*, see Fűrer-Haimendorf, *op. cit.*, ch. 6; and for a discussion of shifting (or swidden) cultivation and its place in peasant society, see Clifford Geertz, *Agricultural Involution: The Process of Ecological Change in Indonesia* (Berkeley, 1963), pp. 15-28, and Eric R. Wolf, *Peasants* (Englewood Cliffs, 1966), pp. 21-5.

vity of the soil had declined, he would abandon that patch for the jungle to recolonize and seek another. A hillman had no special claim to a plot of land once he had ceased to cultivate it. Land was not seen as property to be possessed, bought and sold, though a hillman might have the usufruct of such valued trees as tamarind, mango and jackfruit that grew near his dwelling. With a small (though in the nineteenth century increasing) population dispersed over thousands of square miles of jungle there was no land shortage to engender competition. On the contrary, although it did not call for cooperation beyond immediate kinsmen, *podu* created a common identity *vis-à-vis* outsiders and a shared outlook among the hillmen as a whole.<sup>15</sup>

Before the mid-nineteenth century there was no rival economic system to challenge *podu*. Where practised, animal husbandry was of secondary importance: marketing and trade by barter had little consequence in the hill economy. Migrant traders, called Brinjaris or Lambadis, passed through the hills with their pack bullocks on the way from the coast to Bastar and the Deccan. They exchanged salt, sometimes grain and metal goods, for the beeswax, tamarinds and honey collected by the hillmen. Villagers living above the *ghat* occasionally attended markets, fairs and festivals in the plains; but in general the hillmen were tied to, and sustained by, their *podu* cultivation.<sup>16</sup>

As in other peasant societies, religion permeated almost every aspect of the hillmen's lives. Their beliefs were an amalgam of religious rites and ideas derived from two sources—the *adivasis* and the Hinduism of the plains. The Bagatas feared and propitiated the Koyas' hill spirits (*konda devata*); the Koyas and Konda Doras incorporated the deities of mainstream Hinduism into their pantheon. This syncretism was to be found throughout the Eastern Ghats;<sup>17</sup> and in Gudem and Rampa during the late nineteenth-century *fituris*, animal and human sacrifices to Koya deities were

<sup>15</sup>In this respect we see the *podu* cultivators of Gudem and Rampa as standing midway between peasant agriculture as a basis for cooperation and solidarity (as viewed by Rodney Hilton in *Bond Men Made Free: Medieval Peasant Movements and the English Rising of 1381* (London, 1973), pp. 29-31) and as a source of 'all-pervading individualism' (William Hinton, *Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village* (New York, 1966), p. 55).

<sup>16</sup>For some early accounts of trade in the area, see *Report of the Circuit Committee on the Farms and Havaily Lands Dependent on Masulipatam, 18th December 1786* (Masulipatnam, 1869); *Committee of Circuit's Report, 1787* (Kakinada, 1912), p. 4.

<sup>17</sup>Principal Asst. Agent to Agent, Ganjam, 24 Apr. 1842, in *Reports of the Meriah Agents (Ganjam) from 1837 to 1861* (Madras, 1865), p. 14.

performed alongside the worship of Rama, Hanuman and the Pandavas without any apparent sense of the incompatibility of the two.

Of central importance in the hill people's domestic worship was Mutielamma, who had many of the attributes of the goddess of smallpox and cholera found in the plains.<sup>18</sup> As in other Koya areas, the Gudem and Rampa hillmen also held in special reverence the goddess Malveli or Mamili Devata. According to Cain, in his account of religion in the neighbouring tracts of Rekapalle and Bhadrachalam in the 1870s, the goddess had to be propitiated early in the year to ensure the success of crops. She was, in addition, said to be 'very partial to human victims'.<sup>19</sup> There was grim confirmation of this in the Rampa rebellion of 1879 when the *fituridars* (rebels) ritually executed several of their captives in honour of the goddess. These human (*meriah*) sacrifices had been common in other parts of the Eastern Ghats, especially amongst the Kondmals of the north-east, until the British, between 1837 and 1854, suppressed the practice almost entirely.<sup>20</sup>

Religion was not confined to individual or village worship and sacrifices. The hillman was linked, actively or passively, through his religion to the hillmen of other tracts. Cain records how in 1878 Koya villagers on the banks of the Godavari in western Bhadrachalam were visited by watchmen from a nearby village who brought about twenty fowls. They instructed that these should be passed on to the next village to the south. When asked why, the watchmen explained that the cholera goddess was seizing her victims in the north, but might be tempted south and away from the area by the prospect of a sacrificial feast of chickens.<sup>21</sup> This episode offers not only an excellent illustration of shared religious beliefs providing a basis for communication between villages: it also shows how news and rumours could be transmitted for considerable distances by a village-to-village progression.

*Adivasis* also made pilgrimages to cult centres and shrines revered by hillmen throughout the wider Eastern Ghats region. One such site was Peddakonda, eight miles east of Rekapalle, which

<sup>18</sup>Filmer-Haimendorf, *op. cit.*, pp. 217-18, 225-7; Thurston, *Castes and Tribes*, III, p. 355.

<sup>19</sup>John Cain, 'The Bhadrachallam Taluka, Godavari District, S. India', *Indian Antiquary*, V, 1876, p. 359.

<sup>20</sup>See *Reports of the Meriah Agents (Conjiam)*.

<sup>21</sup>John Cain, 'The Bhadrachallam and Rekapalli Taluqas', *Indian Antiquary*, VIII, 1879, p. 33.



was sacred to the deity Sarlamma; another, Papikonda, on the right bank of the Godavari a few miles upstream from Rampa, was the site of a major festival held every seven or eight years in honour of the Pandavas (whom the *adivasis* believed to be five separate deities). Sacrifices to Malveli may also have been made here. Other cult centres lay within the boundaries of Rampa—for example at Taddepalle, twelve miles north of Chodavaram.<sup>22</sup> In origin these were *adivasi* gods and sacred sites, but, through long association with the Koyas, the Bagatas had absorbed them into their own practices and beliefs. Indeed, the idea that they were part of an ancient and indigenous religion, springing from the hills and streams among which the hillmen lived, perhaps gave them an extra potency in times of collective distress and outside oppression.

The *muttadari* system provided the institutional structure that formally united the various hill communities. Its origins cannot be stated with any certainty. Fürer-Haimendorf suggested that it was introduced into Rampa by the Reddi kings of Rajahmundry during the fourteenth century, though as the term is Persian and Urdu it might have been applied to an already established arrangement during the period of Muslim overlordship from Golconda (1571-1686).<sup>23</sup> The system was not confined to Gudem and Rampa, being found throughout the Eastern Ghats region; and it was, besides, a logical and fairly effective means by which a plains raja could control the hill chiefs.

Although Rampa and Gudem touch shoulders in the mountains, they face in different directions—Gudem towards the plains of Visakhapatnam, Rampa towards the Godavari River and the lowlands of Rajahmundry. The political subordination of the tracts traditionally reflected this divergence. Until 1837 the Gudem hills formed part of the zamindari of Golconda in Visakhapatnam district. The zamindars bore the title 'Bhupati' ('Lord of the Earth') though they were, in their turn, often subordinated to the Rajas of Vizianagaram. From 1794 the Zamindar of Golconda paid his *peshkush* (tributary payments) directly to the East India Company which had acquired Gudem and Rampa from the

<sup>22</sup>Fürer-Haimendorf, op. cit., pp. 203-8; F. R. Hemingway, *Madras District Gazetteers: Godavari* (Madras, 1915), p. 67; Thurston, *Castes and Tribes*, III, p. 355; IV, pp. 64-5; Cain, 'Bhadrachellam and Rekapalli Taluqas', p. 33.

<sup>23</sup>Fürer-Haimendorf, op. cit., pp. 28-9, 167; cf. H. H. Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms of British India* (London, 1855), p. 359.

Mughals in 1765 as part of the Northern Sircars. In 1836 the 17th Zamindar was deposed by the British for alleged imbecility and the neglect of his estate, and in 1837 the zamindari was auctioned to the government for a paltry hundred rupees.

Rampa, nominally subordinated to the Zamindars of Peddapuram, in practice enjoyed virtual autonomy, and at the beginning of the nineteenth century it was ruled over by Ram Bhupati Dev, the Mansabdar. In 1813 the East India Company recognized his authority in Rampa and his claim to four villages at the foot of the *ghat*. In return Ram Bhupati acknowledged the Company as his sovereign, abandoned claims to collect customs duties on the Godavari and promised to surrender thieves and outlaws who fled to the hills.

With an area slightly smaller than Gudem (710 as against 740 square miles in the twentieth century), Rampa was divided into twice the number of *muttas* (estates). Before 1880, Rampa had 23 or 24 *muttas* and thereafter 30 (including Gurtedu and Dutcharti transferred from Gudem in 1880). Gudem had 12 *muttas* until 1880, then 10, some of which were later amalgamated by the government. In 1921 Rampa had 230 villages compared to Gudem's 411, but a population recorded as 28,051 (Gudem: 21,779), and with a population density of 40 per square mile (to Gudem's 30).<sup>24</sup> Gudem was a wilder country, more mountainous and inaccessible than Rampa. Its population was more dispersed; its villages were smaller and poorer. With fewer *muttadars* to manage the larger estates, problems of superior control were more formidable in Gudem than in Rampa.<sup>25</sup> The *muttadari* system in Gudem was further weakened by British meddling with succession to the *muttas* and by the reorganization of the *muttas* in the late nineteenth century. These geographical and administrative factors help to explain why rebellion remained endemic in Gudem longer than in Rampa.

Although they could be dismissed for the neglect of their duties or for disloyalty to their superiors, the *muttadars* of Rampa and Gudem basically held their *muttas* by right of inheritance. They were not landed proprietors. They could not sell, exchange or in

<sup>24</sup>*Madras District Gazetteers: Statistical Appendix for Vizagapatam District* (Madras, 1935), p. 1; *Madras District Gazetteers: Statistical Appendix for Godavari District* (Madras, 1935), p. 1.

<sup>25</sup>Agent, Visakhapatnam, to Sec., Commrs., Land Revenue and Settlement, 1 May 1929, G.O. 2587, Rev., 11 Dec. 1929.

any other way alienate their *muttas* (though in practice by the late nineteenth century they were mortgaging their land to outsiders). They could not partition the *muttas*, but larger ones, like Kota in Rampa, were divided among subordinates, called *durgams*. The *muttadar's* tenure was essentially a *kavalkari* (watch-and-ward) one. He was required to keep order in his *mutta* and to hand over to his superior, the Zamindar of Golconda or the Mansabdar of Rampa, law-breakers and rebels. He also collected revenue from the villages of his *mutta*. This demand, termed *kist* or *kattubadi*, was collected by the village headman (himself a hereditary officer) on a joint-rent basis, each village paying a sum fixed according to the number of households. A *mutta* might contain as few as three or as many as thirty villages, but eight to twelve was the average size. The villages were, however, less stable entities than in the plains as households moved in search of fresh land for *podu*: reports abound of villages abandoned or newly created. The availability of so much jungle land made it easier than on the plains for a cultivator to escape from a vexatious or oppressive lord. There were instances of this happening on a substantial scale in the 1870s on the eve of the rebellion against the Mansabdar of Rampa and his associates. The boundaries of the *muttas*, moreover, were ill-defined in such tangled terrain. The most stable part of a *mutta* was its nucleus, the *muttadar's* home village, from which his *mutta* took its name and often his lineage as well.

It is unlikely that the *muttadars* collected much of their revenues in cash. Most probably took the form of payments in kind (especially grain and jungle produce) and of *vetti*, unpaid labour on the lord's fields. To these were added a host of special fees and customary gifts—for permission to marry, as fines for caste offences, as the lord's share of fruit harvested or game killed. The general impression given in the sources is that the *muttadars* traditionally commanded great respect and exercised considerable influence and control over their villagers, though in Gudem this was certainly weakening by the close of the nineteenth century.<sup>26</sup>

Keeping part of the revenues for himself, the *muttadar* passed the

<sup>26</sup>For the *muttadars*, see Agent, Visakhapatnam to Chief Sec., 20 Feb. 1888, G.O. 744, Jdl., 26 Mar. 1888; Agent, Visakhapatnam, to Sec., Jdl., 28 Nov. 1915, G.O. 2919, Rev. (Confid.), 18 Dec. 1916; Agent, Visakhapatnam, to Sec., Commrs., Land Revenue and Settlement, 1 May 1929, G.O. 2587, Rev., 11 Dec. 1929; Fürer-Haimendorf, op. cit., pp. 168-78.

rest (again probably in kind rather than cash) on to his overlord. The *muttadar* was expected to attend the court of the zamindar or mansabdar twice a year, at Dasara and Pongal, and to provide him with *paiks* (military peons) when required.

Not all the land in Rampa and Gudem was neatly parcelled into *muttas*. Some villages were granted as *mokhasas* to relatives of the overlord or to those whose services and loyalty he wanted to reward. Smaller land grants (*inams*) were given for the maintenance of the overlord's servants and retainers; some appear to have been held by *paiks*. However, the amount of land so distributed was only a small proportion of the total and did not affect the dominance of the *muttadari* system—indeed they were appendages to it.

The *muttadars* were the vital links in an extended chain of authority and subordination stretching from the villagers in the hills to a raja in the plains and hence, far more hazily, to a distant suzerain in Hyderabad, Delhi or Madras. If it was an exotic plant by origin, the *muttadar* system had certainly by the nineteenth century sunk its roots into native soil. It appeared not as an alien institution, but the *fituris* showed, as a focus of loyalty among *adivasis* and long-established immigrants alike.

#### *The Early Fituris, 1839-1862*

Until the 1860s the *muttadars* enjoyed a position of virtual autonomy in the hills. Despite their formal obligations to overlords in the plains, they were saved from external interference and more effective control by the wall of the ghats, the difficult terrain, the hostile climate and the paucity of exploitable resources. While the *muttadars* of Rampa fought against the demands of their mansabdar, those in Gudem found convenient leaders and allies in the deposed zamindari family of *Golgonda* for their struggle against external intervention. In essence both sets of *muttadars* were pursuing their own interests, to preserve their own privileges. At this stage the advantages were almost all on their side. There is little evidence extant of popular involvement in their struggles, apart from the mobilization of the *muttadars*' dependents and raiding into the plains; but the nature of these early struggles and the character of the external intervention was not such as to require much popular involvement. The elite of the hills divided within itself when the threat of outside attack lessened or individual *muttadars* saw advan-

tages in allying with a weak external against a more pressing local rival.

During these years there were two *fituris* in Gudem and Rampa. With the deposition in 1836 of Ananta Bhupati, the 17th Zamindar of Golgonda, the Collector of Visakhapatnam installed Jamma Devamma, widow of the 15th Zamindar, in his place. This was an affront to the *muttadars* and *mokhasadars* of Gudem who were not consulted (as they claimed they customarily were at each succession) and who protested that they had never before been ruled over by a woman. When they had Devamma captured and murdered, the Collector retaliated by confiscating the estate, promising, however, to restore it to the Bhupati family at a future date. The promise was not kept: Ananta Bhupati was imprisoned and in 1837 the zamindari taken over by the government. Accustomed to a minimum of control from above and smarting from the slights to their traditional authority, the *muttadars* soon came into conflict with the tehsildar appointed by the government. In 1845 they rose in revolt (the *first Gudem fituri*, 1845-8), proclaiming Ananta Bhupati's son, Chinna Bhupati, as their rightful raja. After three years of fitful hostilities, the *muttadars* came to terms with the government. They were promised security of tenure for their *muttas* and no undue interference from Indian officials. In a settlement in 1850-51, Chinna Bhupati and his three brothers were made *mokhasadars* of three villages below the ghat as compensation for the loss of the zamindari and as an inducement to future good behaviour. However, events in northern India in 1857 tempted the ex-zamindari family into a second round of hostilities in a bid to improve its fortunes. Chinna Bhupati's nephew, Sanyasi, led a short-lived revolt (the *second Gudem fituri*, 1857-8). Government forces suppressed the rising without difficulty but the Bhupatis' villages, briefly confiscated as a punishment, were restored to them.

In Rampa, the death of the Mansabdar Ram Bhupati Dev in March 1835 was followed by a revolt of *muttadars* against his daughter who had been appointed as the successor. During the rising (the *first Rampa fituri*, 1839-40), the mansabdari family was expelled from the hills, and for the next eight years the tract was troubled by armed conflict and dacoities mainly instigated by contending *muttadars*. No strong man emerged to fill the vacuum created by Ram Bhupati's death, and in October 1848 the govern-

ment persuaded the *muttadars* to accept as their new overlord Ram Bhupati's illegitimate son (who bore the same name) and to pay him a total of Rs 1,000 a year for their *muttas*. This was considerably less than his father had received (at least nominally) and the young Ram Bhupati soon began to seek ways to increase his income from the *muttas*. Partly for this reason, he was never popular in the hills. He lived in his villages at the foot of the ghat and his rare visits to Rampa were met with hostility from the *muttadars*. Two minor revolts against him (the *second and third Rampa fituris*, 1857-8 and 1861-2) were put down by the government, which saw the mansabdar as the most convenient and possibly the only practical way to exert any control over Rampa.

The difficulties experienced by any power from the plains trying to extend its control or enforce its authority above the ghats were demonstrated by the government's attempts to suppress the 1845-8 Gudem *fituri*. P. B. Smollett, Agent for Visakhapatnam, and his military advisers were contemptuous of the fighting capacities of the hillmen, but they were soon forced to admit the advantages which the mountains, the jungle, the rainy climate and the ravages of disease gave to their opponents. With sixty to seventy inches of rain falling between May and November, military campaigning was confined to the dry months from the end of January to mid-April. During the rains villages were virtually cut off and malaria and hill fevers incapacitated troops unacclimatized to the highlands. Lieutenant-Colonel J. Campbell of the Madras Army reported in June 1846 that 'severe sickness paralyses every effort, disheartens the men, and fosters the preconceived belief of the superiority and valour of the insurgents'.<sup>27</sup> Smollett, himself a victim of 'jungle fever', lamented the difficulty of procuring guides to help locate the rebels 'in their mountain fastnesses'.<sup>28</sup> The hillmen abandoned their villages as soldiers approached, hid their grain in the jungle and drove off the cattle. There was little the army could do except burn deserted huts and wait for the *fituridars* to squabble among themselves and sue for peace.

Precisely because it feared such wasteful and inconclusive expeditions the Government of Madras had opposed the Agent's proposal for a punitive campaign against the Gudem hillmen.

<sup>27</sup>Campbell to Deputy Asst. Adjutant-General, Northern Division, 15 June 1846, MJP, no. 6, 4 Aug. 1846.

<sup>28</sup>Agent to Chief Sec., 5 June 1847, MJP, no. 15, 29 June 1847.

Administrators of the period were fond of quoting a minute written by Sir Thomas Munro as Governor of Madras in 1823 in which he expressed a fear that the government might at any time be 'dragged into a petty warfare among unhealthy hills, where an enemy is hardly ever seen, where numbers of valuable lives are lost from the climate, and where we often lose but never gain reputation.'<sup>29</sup> In the 1840s the government held this view as much about Rampa as Gudem. In deciding to restore Rampa to the mansabdari family, the Board of Revenue observed in 1848 that 'tracts such as that under consideration—wild and unproductive—and which from the character of the country and climate must be difficult of management by the officers of Government, are always best confided to the administration of their native chiefs'.<sup>30</sup> Thus the difficulties of external control over the hills obliged the Madras government to follow the ancient expedient of indirect control through the *muttadari* system.

The smallness of the revenue and trade to be gleaned from the hills was a further disincentive to attempting tighter control. But there was one vital consideration which made it impossible for plains rulers to ignore the hills entirely. The hillmen were raiders, sweeping down from the ghat at harvest time to plunder villagers in the plains of their grain and cattle.<sup>31</sup> It was in an attempt to check these incursions that in its treaty of 1813 with the Mansabdar of Rampa the government entrusted him with several plains villages as an inducement to discourage raiding and to keep the peace above the ghat. A similar obligation was written into the agreement with the new mansabdar in 1848.<sup>32</sup> The raids of Gudem hillmen were also responsible for forcing the government to act in 1847-8 during the first *fituri*. Apart from the severe loss of revenue from the villages looted in the Visakhapatnam plains, the government saw persistent raiding as too serious a challenge to its authority to be left unchecked.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup>A. J. Arbuthnot (ed.), *Major-General Sir Thomas Munro: Selections from his Writings and other Official Minutes* (London, 1881), I, p. 211

<sup>30</sup>Minute, 24 Aug. 1848, Board of Rev. Procs., 24 Aug. 1848.

<sup>31</sup>*Committee of Circuit's Report, 1787*, p. 4.

<sup>32</sup>Loc. cit.; District Magistrate, Rajahmundry, to Sec., Jdl., 28 Sept. 1813, MJP, 8 Oct. 1813; District Magistrate to Sec., Board of Rev., 22 June 1848, Board of Rev. Procs., 24 Aug. 1848.

<sup>33</sup>Agent to Sec., Jdl., 27 Nov. 1847, MJP, no. 61, 24 Dec. 1847; 30 Nov. 1847, MJP, no. 62, 24 Dec. 1847; 4 Dec. 1847, MJP, no. 63, 24 Dec. 1847; Governor's minute, 29 Dec. 1847, MJP, no. 77, 24 Dec. 1847.

A closer look at the years 1845-8 in Gudem and 1840-8 in Rampa will help to clarify the character of the disturbances in the hills during this early period. The abolition of the Golgonda zamindari in 1837 affected three groups in Gudem—the zamindar's family, the *muttadars* and *mokhasadars*, and the armed retainers. It is significant that the initiative for the *fituri* came not from the first or last of these, but from the *muttadars*. Partly by persuasion, partly by force, they induced Chinna Bhupati to leave his residence in Madugula, and it was at their instigation that he was declared the rightful heir to the zamindari. Chinna's brothers did not join the rising and Chinna himself told the Agent that he wanted to escape from the *muttadars*' grasp.<sup>34</sup> Loyalty to their overlord may have motivated the *muttadars* to some extent. Smollett in June 1846 found a general feeling in the Gudem hills that 'the ancient family of Golgonda has been treated with little consideration by the ruling power'; and in 1852, after the suppression of the *fituri*, Smollett's successor as Agent noted that the *muttadars* still entertained a 'feeling of feudal attachment' to the Bhupatis.<sup>35</sup>

'Feudal' loyalties apart, the Gudem *muttadars* saw an identity of interest between themselves and the deposed zamindari family. As a scion of the former rulers, Chinna Bhupati made a suitable figurehead and symbol of opposition of chieftainship to all the innovations and interference that accompanied the government takeover of the zamindari. The loss of the zamindars had led to the eclipse of the *muttadars*' powers and cast their independence into shadow. Formerly they had exercised 'great influence' and 'in their own hills they were wholly beyond control of magisterial authority'. Under the new regime the government tahsildar summoned them to appear before him to answer for alleged crimes and violations of the law. Understandably they sought to restore the old rulers to save them from the new.<sup>36</sup>

The *muttadars* did not act as a united force during the *fituri*. Those of Gudem Patavidi (Gudem 'Old Street') and Gudem Kottavidi ('New Street') were the principal rebels. The others were drawn along with them or supported whichever side appeared to be

<sup>34</sup>Agent of Chief Sec., 14 Oct. 1846, MJP, no. 1, 5 Jan. 1847; 17 Nov. 1849, MJP, no. 1, 4 Jan. 1850.

<sup>35</sup>Agent to Chief Sec., 26 June 1846, MJP, no. 7, 4 Aug. 1846; 3 Jan. 1852, no. 11, 23 Jan. 1852.

<sup>36</sup>Agent to Chief Sec., 17 Nov. 1849, MJP, no. 1, 4 Jan. 1850.



winning. This is the kind of internal division and self-interested opportunism one would expect among warring 'feudal' chiefs. It is indicative, too, of the extent to which this was a revolt of the *muttadar* elite rather than of peasant subalterns that the rebel forces included mercenaries—matchlockmen from below the ghats. The *muttadar* of Gudem Patavidi was said to have four or five hundred of these, but since the government's agents never saw the rebel forces assembled together this figure cannot be relied on.<sup>37</sup>

Among the other non-*muttadar* elements on the rebel side were the 'Costies', who served both as combatants and as intermediaries between the *muttadars* and the government officials. They are described as being 'feudal militiamen' and from 'peon castes'; presumably they are identical with the *paiks* referred to earlier. Their grievance was that with the abolition of the zamindari they lost their special status and were required to pay the full assessment on their formerly rent-free or reduced-rent lands. The Costies therefore joined the *muttadars'* revolt to agitate for the restoration of the zamindars and of their old privileges.<sup>38</sup> After the *fituri* their complaints were investigated and partly redressed. Within a few years they were reported to have 'settled quietly down' as cultivators, and there is no further reference to them in connection with the *fituris*.<sup>39</sup>

Events in Rampa between 1840 and 1848 did not constitute a *fituri*, but they followed from the expulsion of the late mansabdar's immediate family in the 1839-40 revolt and they show a pattern of elite feuding and raiding similar to Gudem's in the same period. There were four main parties among the elite. First, there was a band of about thirty men (the usual size for hill gangs) led by Karam Tamman Dora, the Koya *muttadar* of Bandapalli in central Rampa. In 1840 Tamman Dora led a daring ambush on a police party in which twelve police subordinates were killed and twenty wounded. By this exploit Tamman Dora became a hero among the hillmen while to the government he was a 'desperate man' and rewards were offered for his capture. With his gang he retreated

<sup>37</sup>Agent to Chief Sec., 10 July 1847, MJP, no. 21, 10 Aug. 1847.

<sup>38</sup>Agent to Chief Sec., 14 Oct. 1846, MJP, no. 1, 5 Jan. 1847; 9 Jan. 1847, MJP, no. 35, 23 Mar. 1847; Agent to Sec., Jdl., 23 Oct. 1847, no. 5, 7 Dec. 1847; Agent to Chief Sec., 17 Nov. 1849, MJP, 4 Jan. 1850.

<sup>39</sup>Agent to Commr., Northern Sircars, 5 Aug. 1852, MJP, no. 13, 7 Sept. 1852; Procs. of the Inam Commr., Visakhapatnam, 25 June 1852, in *A Collection of Papers relating to the Inam Settlement in the Madras Presidency* (Madras, 1906), p. 146.

through Gudem into Juddangi (a small hill tract wedged between Gudem, Rampa and the Godavari plains). There he disappeared. In 1848 the mansabdar confiscated Bandapalli *muttá* claiming that there were no heirs, but in 1880 a son of Tamman Dora was installed as *muttadar*.<sup>40</sup>

A second party was headed by Paulapu Peddi Reddi, a Bagata ally of Tamman Dora. He had initiated the disturbances in 1835 by raiding the mansabdar's house and he joined Tamman Dora in the ambush of the police in 1840. He was arrested in March 1846 and died in Rajahmundry before the trial. His three sons raised a gang of about thirty men and set out to avenge themselves by dacoity and arson against those who had betrayed their father to the police. The principal victims were leaders of the third party, Rami Reddi, *muttadar* of Valamuru, and Lurrimi Reddi of Musurumilli *mutta*. Finally, there was Shankar Bhupati, a relative of the late mansabdar and the *muttadar* of Koya, the largest Rampa *mutta*. He was at first neutral, but a long-standing dispute with Peddi Reddi and the depredations of his sons drove Shankar into the opposing faction.<sup>41</sup> It was more through the exertions of the latter than any skill on the part of the police that the disturbances were quelled and an agreement reached to instal a new mansabdar.

In Rampa, as in Gudem, the *muttadars* dominated the scene of conflict. When not fighting against invading police and troops, they feuded among themselves. Popular participation in these struggles appears to have been slight: small gangs and mercenaries did most of the fighting. Villagers fled from attack into the jungles; some may have joined the chiefs' gangs in plundering plains villages. The 1840s witnessed the rebelliousness and the feuding of the elite, not the risings of the peasant masses.

### *Forces of Change*

It is ironic that the hill tracts of the Northern Sircars, formerly written off by British administrators as virtually worthless and merely a source of danger to the adjacent plains, came in the late nineteenth century to be seen as an area of great economic

<sup>40</sup>District Magistrate, Rajahmundry, to Sec., Jdl., 5 Dec. 1846, MJP, no. 27, 12 Jan. 1847; 'Memoir of the Settlement of the Muttas composing the Rampa Estate', MJP, no. 111-C, 16 Jan. 1880, App. IV.

<sup>41</sup>District Magistrate, Rajahmundry, to Chief Sec., 5 Dec. 1846, MJP, no. 27, 12 Jan. 1847; 27 Sept. 1847, MJP, no. 30, 12 Oct. 1847.

potential. It was in this spirit that the Agency Commissioner crowed in 1921 that the time had come to 'open out for the benefit of the world at large . . . a vast tract of fertile, inaccessible but potentially productive country, rich in minerals and in other natural assets, sparsely populated and hitherto undeveloped.'<sup>42</sup>

British attitudes to the opening up of the hill tracts were admittedly more equivocal than this bold statement suggests. They were convinced that 'progress' must be introduced to the backward hillmen, who must 'move with the times, or be left behind in the race', abandon their 'reckless and primitive modes of agriculture' and become an integral part of the colonial economy.<sup>43</sup> But, at the same time, they intensely disliked the Indian traders, money-lenders and contractors who were the actual agents of that transformation. The gullibility and defencelessness of the hill peoples brought out the paternalist in many British officials, and from time to time they devised measures to protect them from what one administrator described as the 'grasping knavish Telugu usurer' who fixed 'his talons in the vitals of the petty chiefs and headmen' in the hills.<sup>44</sup> In its ceaseless search for more revenue the government promoted the sale of alcohol and drugs, but then attributed the supposed indolence of the hillmen and the backwardness of the area to toddy and addiction to opium. Contradictions such as these abounded. But they were, in the final analysis, mere swirls and eddies on the surface while beneath ran the remorseless currents of economic change. Whatever doubts the British had about their policy of opening up the hills to outside exploitation were outweighed by their belief in the primacy of property rights and the supreme importance of 'law and order'. The implementation of these principles almost invariably placed the strength of the government on the side of the 'grasping knavish Telugu usurer' and in opposition to the hillmen.

One of the most visible signs of the transformation of the hills was the construction of roads. These had an obvious military function, but they were even more important in facilitating commercial penetration. Road building dates from the aftermath

<sup>42</sup>Agency Commnr. to Sec., Rev., 11 May 1921, G. O. 1933-A, Rev., 25 Aug. 1921.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*; Hemingway, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

<sup>44</sup>D. F. Carmichael, cited by Agent, Visakhapatnam, to Chief Sec., 11 May 1885, G. O. 1546, 12 June 1885.

of the 1879-80 Rampa rebellion and was seen as vital for stimulating economic progress. H. G. Turner, Agent for Visakhapatnam in 1885, visualized a series of roads running down from the hills to meet the Madras-Calcutta railway. 'The whole produce of the hill tracts', he wrote in that spirit of economic optimism and 'civilizing mission' common among the European colonialists of his day, 'would pass down our mountain roads to the railway at their base, and the more mountain roads we make, the better it will be for the railway, as well as for the hill tracts themselves'.<sup>45</sup>

Financial constraints and construction difficulties hampered this ambitious scheme, but Turner's was neither an idle nor a solitary vision. With the completion of the coastal railway in 1893, a branch line was constructed to Bobbili and Salur (though the link line across the hills to Raipur was not completed until much later). In 1886 the government authorized the building of a ten mile stretch of road up the Lamasingi ghat in south-eastern Gudem: this connected with bridle paths (later converted to cart tracks) across the hills to Darakonda and Malakanagiri. After the 1922-4 *fituri* new earth roads were cut and the cart tracks metalled.<sup>46</sup> In Rampa a metalled road was built as far as Chodavaram in the early 1880s and by the 1930s it was possible to drive from there to Rajahmundry in a few hours. The carts tracks on from Chodavaram to the north and west were metalled and were reported in 1919 as having 'a great effect in opening up the country'. Two other important roads dating from the 1880s ran north from Yeleswaram, one through Dutcharti and Gurtedu *muttas*, the other through Juddangi.<sup>47</sup>

Road construction in the hills stimulated the growth of markets at their foot—Yeleswaram, Gokavaram and Krishnadevipet among them—as well as weekly markets in the principal hill villages—Chodavaram, Kota, Lamasingi and Addatigala. At these traders from the plains purchased tamarinds, gall-nuts, oranges, mangoes, honey, beeswax and other hill products. They were forwarded to the main produce markets at Rajahmundry and Kakinada; some eventually found their way to Madras, Calcutta,

<sup>45</sup>Agent to Chief Sec., 21 July 1885, G. O. 28\*2, Jdl., 20 Oct. 1885.

<sup>46</sup>G. O. 3080, Jdl., 18 Nov. 1886; Agent, Visakhapatnam, to Sec., Rev., 15 July 1932, G. O. 2193, Rev., 27 Oct. 1932.

<sup>47</sup>Agent, Godavari, to Chief Sec., 29 July 1884, G. O. 2618, Jdl., 27 Sept. 1909; *Godavari Statistical Appendix*, pp. 413-14.

Bombay, London and Hamburg.<sup>48</sup> By the 1920s the hills had become a part, albeit a very small part, of the international economy.

Commercial penetration had not waited for the road building of the 1880s however. Even before the Rampa rebellion of 1879-80, traders and money-lenders were pushing into the hills and beginning to undermine the traditional economy. Malas, a caste of untouchables who in the lowlands were among the most despised of Hindus, were quick to see the economic opportunities created by the more stable conditions of the 1850s and 1860s, and by the gradual extension of British control after 1848. Operating at first as petty traders, like the Brinjaris before them, peddling goods from their pack bullocks and spending months on their trading expeditions into the hills, they acquired the capital and expertise to develop into flourishing traders. They extended their activities to money-lending to cultivators and *muttadars*, and took over hill villages as their own settlements. In the Malas' wake came Komatis, the affluent and powerful trading caste that dominated commerce, especially the grain trade, in the plains. Unlike the Malas, the Komatis rarely lived in the hills, nor did they trouble with petty trade. They sought the larger profits to be made from timber, opium and drink or from the mortgaging of *muttadars'* estates.

Investigations which followed the outbreak of the Rampa rebellion in 1879 unearthed evidence of how the traders and *sahukars* (money-lenders) operated in the hills. Traders advanced money to illiterate hillmen in return for contracts specifying a quantity of tamarinds to be delivered at the next harvest. The hillmen were almost invariably induced to promise more than they could deliver, and when they failed to do so the traders threatened to take them to court for breach of contract. As the hillmen 'would much sooner walk into a tiger's den than put in an appearance in the Rajahmundry Court', the traders easily obtained *ex parte* decrees for the confiscation of a hillman's property, often for far more than the contract was worth. For a debt of five rupees a trader might carry off cattle and produce worth a hundred. Sometimes the formality of a suit was dispensed with and the trader, accompanied by a friend claiming to be an officer of the courts,

<sup>48</sup>Hemingway, *op. cit.*, pp. 96, 112; *Godavari Statistical Appendix*, pp. 415, 425; Agent, E. Godavari, to Board of Rev., 6 Mar. 1927, G. O. 2221, Rev., 25 Sept. 1928.

made the distraint himself.<sup>49</sup> Ignorant of their legal standing, the hillmen were bewildered but resentful. One Konda Dora who lost two cattle worth ten rupees each said afterwards: 'I do not know why I let him take them. We are afraid. We do not understand.'<sup>50</sup>

In the plains dacoity and other forms of crime and popular disturbances fluctuated with the agricultural season, reaching a peak in years of bad harvest, drought and incipient famine.<sup>51</sup> That this pattern did not normally apply to the Agency was indicative of the extent of the *sahukars'* hold over the hillmen. In years of poor harvest there was little for the hillman to eat or the *sahukar* to distraint. In bountiful years the *sahukars* descended at harvest time, like a plague of locusts, taking the grain from the threshing-floor and the tamarinds from the trees.<sup>52</sup> For the hillman 'good years' and 'bad years' were almost equally bad.

The fact that the Malas were untouchables recently risen to wealth and social influence was as galling to the hillmen as their rapacious trading and usury. The Bagatas, accustomed to being 'the lords of the hills', bitterly resented the arrogance of the new-rich Malas. The indebted *muttadars* complained that the traders ignored their authority and were 'a disobedient set of people'. Anger quickly flared up between Malas and Bagatas—when Malas made free with their women or beat them in a cock fight.<sup>53</sup> It is not surprising that the Malas were one of the principal targets for attack whenever there was a dacoity, a riot or a *fituri*.

The Komatis were less visible and less vulnerable (since they generally conducted their operations from the plains), but they were equally disliked. One of the acts of the mansabdar that particularly incensed the Rampa hillmen was the removal of hereditary *muttadars* and the leasing of their *muttas* to Komatis. The *muttadar* of Birampalli was deposed about 1869. The mansabdar kept three of the ten villages in the *mutta* for his own profit and in 1873 leased the other seven for Rs 40 a year to Pragulapati Virayya,

<sup>49</sup>H. E. Sullivan to Chief Sec., 29 Sept. 1879, MJP, no. 111-C, 16 Jan. 1880.

<sup>50</sup>Statement of Madakam Potti Dora, *ibid*.

<sup>51</sup>See David Arnold, 'Dacoity and Rural Crime in Madras, 1860-1940', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 6, 2 (Jan. 1979), pp. 145-9.

<sup>52</sup>Special Asst. Agent, Godavari, to Agent, 12 June 1893, G. O. 1502, Jdl., 25 July 1893; Agent to Chief Sec., 19 Nov. 1900, G. O. 1928, Jdl., 27 Dec. 1900.

<sup>53</sup>Agent to Chief Sec., 17 Oct. 1886, G. O. 3080, Jdl., 18 Nov. 1886; 20 Feb. 1888, G. O. 744, Jdl., 26 Mar. 1888; Head Asst. Agent, Narsipatnam, to Agent, 30 May 1901, G. O. 1371, Jdl., 2 Sept. 1901.

a Komati from Kotapalli at the foot of the ghat. Virayya was thus given a free hand to extract as much as he could from the *mutta*, 'a privilege of which . . . he availed himself so freely that the people, driven to despair, joined the *fituri* directly it broke out [in 1879].' He realized about Rs 300 a year in village rents: in 1848 the entire *mutta's kattubadi* had been fixed at a mere Rs 40 a year. In addition he took the produce of two tamarind trees in each village and lent money to the deposed *muttadar* at high rates of interest. 'We cannot stand the Soucars: I mean the *mutta* being mortgaged to them,' protested the *muttadar's* uncle. 'They impose too much rent on us.'<sup>54</sup>

Komatias also exploited two other sources of income—taxes on locally produced toddy and fees for woodcutting in the forests. Until 1872 the hillmen of Rampa, in common with other inhabitants of the presidency, were permitted to draw toddy for domestic consumption without a license. As the government felt that this boon was being abused to the detriment of its *abkari* revenue, in 1872 it was annulled. Certain areas were, however, exempted including the Agency tracts of Ganjam and Visakhapatnam, and Bhadrachalam and Rekapalle when they were transferred from the Central Provinces to the Godavari Agency in 1874. By an administrative oversight Rampa was not granted this concession, but the anomaly was not at first felt. The renter of the Rampa arrack and toddy farm licensed a few arrack shops, but did not concern himself with toddy. However, in 1875 a separately leased toddy farm for Rajahmundry taluk (including Rampa) was granted for three years at Rs 11,000 a year. To cover this large outlay the renter demanded from the Rampa *muttadars* a tax (known as *chigurupannu*), fixed according to the number of trees tapped in each village. Although the tax was an innovation, it was at first too small to arouse opposition. However, in July 1878 the toddy farm was again auctioned, this time for Rs 9,210 a year more than in 1875, and the renter demanded an enhanced tax. At the same time the mansabdar decided to levy a tax of his own, called *modalupannu*, at a rate varying from between one-third to a half of the *chiguru-pannu*. Few forms of taxation could have affected the peasants of Rampa more directly than taxes on toddy. From March to June, when the *podu* fields had been cleared and food stocks were low, the hillmen 'almost live[d] upon palmyra and sago palm toddy'.

<sup>54</sup>Statements of Karain Pandu Dora and Pragulapati Virayya, and app. IV, MJP, no. 111-C, 16 Jan. 1880.

Not surprisingly, they reacted by refusing to pay the new taxes, which were 'the last straw—the spark that fired the train' of growing discontent with the mansabdar's regime. Almost at once, on 13 March 1879, the Rampa rebellion began.<sup>55</sup>

Grazing and forest taxes were secondary irritants by comparison. The woodcutting tax, *kalapapannu*, for the eleven *muttas* under the mansabdar's control was farmed out for Rs 981 a year, the grazing tax, *pulleri* for Rs 162. In Birampalli, Virayya, the Komati renter, levied his own small wood and grazing taxes.<sup>56</sup>

One of the most profound consequences of the intrusion of the trader and money-lender into the hills *after* the Rampa rebellion was the alienation of land. As pointed out earlier, traditionally hillmen did not regard land as a saleable commodity. But to the plainsmen it was, and the courts tended to support their claims for the attachment of land for breach of contract and failure to repay debts. In this way large parts of the more accessible and fertile *muttas* passed into the hands of *sahukars*, who either retained the hillmen as tenant cultivators or leased it to immigrants from the plains. In Antada *mutta* in Gudem 'tract after tract of fertile land' was lost by the *muttadar* through his indebtedness and immigrant Telagas took over cultivation from the hillmen. In 1904 the government consolidated this process by deposing the *muttadar* and converting several villages to ryotwari settlement.<sup>57</sup>

By the Agency Land and Interest Act of 1917, the Government of Madras made a belated attempt to protect the hillmen from indebtedness and land alienation. The act prohibited contracts in which the rate of interest would exceed 24 per cent a year and forbade any transfer of immovable property in the Agency tracts from a hillman to an outsider without the Agent's prior consent. The bill was strongly opposed by the Indian members of the Madras Legislative Council who threw back at the British their own shibboleths of 'progress' and 'development'. The District Association of Visakhapatnam, a forerunner of the District Congress Committee, urged that the eighty year old distinction

<sup>55</sup>Sullivan to Chief Sec., 29 Sept. 1879, *ibid.*; Joint Magistrate, Chodavaram, to District Magistrate, 18 Mar. 1879, MJP, no. 313, 25 Mar. 1879. In the settlement of 1879-80, a small *chigurupannu* was incorporated in the *muttadars' kattubadi*.

<sup>56</sup>App. III, MJP, no. 111-C, 16 Jan. 1880.

<sup>57</sup>Agent, undated memo., G. O. 1540, Jdl., 16 Oct. 1903; Principal Asst. Agent to Agent, Visakhapatnam, 31 Mar. 1890, G. O. 1808, Jdl., 19 Nov. 1890; Agent to Chief Sec., 25 June 1906, G. O. 1528, Jdl., 25 June 1906.



between the administrations of the Agency and the plains should be scrapped and free immigration into the hills permitted. Its memorial claimed that contact with plains cultivators had already proved beneficial to the hillmen through the introduction of improved methods of agriculture.<sup>56</sup> As will be seen later in connection with the 1922-4 *fituri*, the Indian nationalists of the plains were no friends of the hillmen; rather they voiced the avarice, the hunger for land and profit, of the Telugu contractors, traders and immigrant farmers. On this occasion, however, they were, in part, thwarted. The act slowed down the rate of land alienation and provided some check on indebtedness, even though it did not solve the basic problems involved.

The invasion of the money-lender, trader and contractor affected not only the peasantry: it also forced the indigenous elite into new roles. The *muttadars*, in the new order, were both exploited and exploiters. They, like many of the peasants, fell into the clutches of the money-lender and lost their land; some of their estates were forfeited to the mansabdar or confiscated by the government. Their authority was weakened by the arrival of plainsmen who ignored their commands. They, like other hillmen, detested the wealth and influence of the Malas and Komatis. But at the same time, the *muttadars* found that they had inherited rights which could bring them substantial profits in the new economy. This was important in driving a wedge between the *muttadar* elite and the peasant subalterns.

With the construction of metalled roads and tracks into hitherto inaccessible parts of Rampa in the 1880s, large-scale commercial exploitation of the forests began. Within the space of the decade the *muttadars* of Birampalli, Musurumilli and Dutcharti were each receiving from contractors between Rs 1,000 and Rs 1,500 each in wood-cutting fees. Compared to the contractors' own profits, these sums were 'ridiculously small', but they gave the *muttadars* an interest in forest exploitation and encouraged them to see their estates in more capitalistic terms than formerly. It is no coincidence that from this period on there were frequent reports of *muttadars* raising village rents and thus provoking peasant hostility. The government's policy towards the *muttadars* was highly ambiguous. On the one hand it censured them if they showed any signs of

<sup>56</sup>Memorial from Sec., Dist. Assoc., Visakhapatnam, to Sec., Local and Municipal, 8 Nov. 1916, L/P&J/6/4083.

disloyalty during the *fituris* and it criticized their indebtedness and mismanagement of estates. But when *muttadars* began to behave more like capitalist proprietors by rack-renting and taking a cut from tree-felling and the sale of drink and drugs, the government was indignant and stopped them.

Wanting to acquire the profits from forest exploitation for itself and to curb what it saw as the contractors' 'unmethodical and reckless' felling, in 1892 the Government of Madras declared that the right to permit tree-felling and to collect the tax had formerly rested with the mansabdar, not the *muttadars*. With his departure in 1879 that right fell to the state. Thinking it unwise (rather than unjust) suddenly to deprive the *muttadars* of their forest income (and thus perhaps goad them to rebellion for a second time), the government promised to pay a nominal annual sum as compensation to those who had collected it recently.<sup>59</sup>

The government's role in the transformation of the hills requires further elaboration. Perhaps its greatest single contribution was the restriction of *podu* and the creation of forest reserves. This policy dated from the late 1870s and reflected government concern that the rapid deforestation of large areas of India might have been an indirect cause of the recent famines, especially that of 1876-8.<sup>60</sup> Since it was too late to save many of the forests in the plains, the preservation of those in the hills assumed proportionally greater importance. Forestry officers sent to assess the value of the Agency forests (and they were no longer described as jungle once they had become the object of such keen commercial interest) were greatly alarmed at what they saw as the destructiveness of *podu*. It was said to be ruinous to the forests, to cause soil erosion, landslips and the drying up of springs. It was predicted that the forests would disappear under the axe and fire of the hillmen within a few years unless urgent conservation measures were taken.<sup>61</sup> The government acted promptly. Beginning with Rekapalle and Bhadrachalam, recently transferred from the Central

<sup>59</sup>Principal Asst. Agent to Agent, Godavari, 13 May 1889, G. O. 1632, Jdl., 21 Sept. 1889; Collector, Godavari, to Conservator of Forests, Northern Circle, 7 July 1889, G. O. 103, Rev., 3 Feb. 1890, Dist., Forest Officer, Lower Godavari, to Collector, 14 Apr. 1913, G. O. 140, Rev., 15 Jan. 1914; Resolution, Board of Rev., 23 Aug. 1892, G. O. 1280, Rev., 21 Dec. 1892.

<sup>60</sup>See the evidence of Lt.-Col. Beddome in *Report of the Famine Commission* (London, n.d.), III, pp. 520-2.

<sup>61</sup>Deputy Conservator of Forests to Collector, Godavari, 17 Sept. 1877, G. O. 474, Rev., 25 Feb. 1879.

Provinces, it trebled the cultivators' axe tax, confined *podu* to specially designated areas and imposed new fees on forest contractors. The result of this sudden interference with traditional cultivation was to give mass support in Rekapalle and Bhadrachalam to the *fituri* which began in Rampa in March 1879 and soon spread to the neighbouring tracts.<sup>62</sup>

Although the new forest policy had not been introduced into Rampa, after the rebellion the government decided against trying to extend it there for fear of renewed unrest. Hillmen were still allowed to collect minor forest produce, cut timber for their own use and graze their cattle without charge. Only certain productive trees, such as tamarinds and gall-nuts, were protected and the government limited itself to collecting duties on forest produce and timber exported from Rampa and on cattle brought into the area to graze. Even this was profitable: Rampa yielded Rs 40,270 in forest revenue in 1908-9. Not until the mid-1920s did the government bring Rampa into line with other hill tracts by restricting *podu* and tree-felling.<sup>63</sup> In Gudem no such concessions were ever made: forests were reserved, *podu* was confined to a few areas, and the collection of even building materials for hillmen's huts restricted.

In place of *podu* and the traditional economy of the hillmen based upon it, two new systems of land use and labour were developed. These were the commercial exploitation of the forests and the extension of settled agriculture into the more accessible parts of the hills. In both of these systems the hillmen found themselves forced into subordinate roles. They either became poor tenants and sharecroppers working for an outsider landlord and producing crops for a market rather than, as in the past, for their own subsistence; or they joined a landless, rural proletariat, felling trees, cutting bamboo, hauling timber, for a plains contractor. Debt and an inability to control (perhaps even to understand) the changes that had overtaken their society kept the hillmen bound to their new masters. The transformation, so profoundly destructive of the old order, left them disoriented and, in the end, defeated. Against the combined strength of the state and the *sahukar*, they felt ultimately powerless to resist.<sup>64</sup> The *fituris* of the late nine-

<sup>62</sup>Sullivan to Chief Sec., 4 Aug. 1879, MJP, no. 111-A, 16 Jan. 1880.

<sup>63</sup>Hemingway, op. cit., pp. 95-6; *Godavari Statistical Appendix*, pp. 240-2; Agent to Chief Sec., 19 July 1909, G. O. 1288, Jdl., 27 Sept. 1909.

<sup>64</sup>Pfarrer-Haimendorf, op. cit., pp. 299-300.

teenth century were a spirited protest against a changing world, but they could do nothing lasting to keep out the forces impinging on the hills from outside. Indeed, the government's reaction to the *fituris* was to augment measures for the further opening up of the hills to outside penetration.

The sale of opium was another area where the state and the trader-contractor collaborated to the detriment of the hillman. Opium sapped their will and capacity to resist; it drew them deeper into the plains-based money economy. At best it offered a bleak solace. We have seen no reference to opium-taking in the hills before the 1880s. The drug was not grown there and could only have reached the hillmen, if at all, in very small quantities before the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when it began to be imported in large quantities from Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh via Rajahmundry. Until 1884 opium in the Visakhapatnam Agency (including Gudem) was a government monopoly, sold through licensed vendors. In that year the monopoly was given gratis to the firm of Hemraj Ramlal, which made such a huge profit in the first twelve months that the following year the government demanded a fee of Rs 6,000. By 1892 this had risen to Rs 22,225. The quantities sold fluctuated, but in the late 1880s and early 1890s the nine opium shops in Gudem sold between 292 and 807 pounds a year.<sup>65</sup> In Rampa the *muttadars* and *mokhasadars* held the licenses for 14 of the 15 shops and took a large share of the profits. The *muttadar* of Rampa confessed to making Rs 20 on each chest of opium he imported from Rajahmundry.<sup>66</sup> The use of the drug became so widespread that by the late 1880s British administrators were blaming addiction for the backwardness of the area.<sup>67</sup> Along with the sale of alcohol, opium speeded the process of demoralization and social disintegration that other agents of change had begun. In this the hillmen of Gudem and Rampa resembled countless other 'backward' peoples throughout the world who, with their traditional society shattered by the invasion of western capitalism, have turned to drink and drugs for consolation.

In return for the revenue it took from the hills, the government

<sup>65</sup>Agent to Chief Sec., 21 July 1885, G. O. 2822, Jdl., 20 Oct. 1885; 9 Aug. 1893, G. O. 1932, Jdl., 22 Sept. 1893.

<sup>66</sup>Principal Asst. Agent to Agent, Godavari, 13 June 1886; G. O. 2966, Jdl., 2 Nov. 1886; Agent to Sec., Commnr. of Salt, Abkari and Separate Rev., 17 July 1889, G. O. 848, Rev., 18 Oct. 1889.

<sup>67</sup>Agent to Chief Sec., 12 July 1889, G. O. 1627, Jdl., 21 Sept. 1889.

gave back only a minimum of services and they were of doubtful benefit to the hillmen. It built roads, but they most obviously advantaged the military and the plains traders. It built schools and dispensaries, but staffed them with plainsmen who often took the opportunity to exploit the hillmen. In the schools, too, Telugu was the language of instruction and the majority of pupils were the children of traders and officials from the plains.<sup>68</sup>

From the early 1860s, with the establishment of a provincial constabulary, the government began to set up police stations in the hills. There were three stations in Rampa (reduced to two in 1879) and four in Gudem. The forces posted to them were not large. In March 1879, at the time of the outbreak of rebellion, there were only 3 head constables and 30 constables in Rampa.<sup>69</sup> But, left without proper supervision, the police had the opportunity to become even more openly corrupt and rapacious than in the plains. When a villager died by accident the police said that they suspected murder in order to extract a bribe to keep quiet. A Muslim head constable (ritually executed by the *fituridars* in March 1879) demanded Rs 60 from the *muttadar* of Mohanapuram when a man was killed by a tiger in his *mutta*: 'you have not reported the circumstances for three days', the policeman reputedly said, 'this is probably murder'. Policemen also expected to be fed and sheltered when they visited a village on duty and to be given presents at Dasara. The hillmen seem not to have resented these demands, seeing in them the customary dues paid to state servants.<sup>70</sup> The hillmen did, however, identify the police with the exactions of the *sahukars* and the mansabdar in Rampa. The latter was adept at using the authority of the government, particularly the presence of police officers, to enforce his demands from the villagers and to give them a veneer of legality.<sup>71</sup>

In conclusion to this account of the change affecting the hills from the 1860s, two points deserve to be stressed. Firstly, although the association of the state, the *sahukar* and (in the Rampa case) the mansabdar was firmly fixed in the hillman's mind, the position of the *muttadar* was ambiguous. At times he was himself exploiter and oppressor: he rack-rented, he demanded *vetti* labour for his fields,

<sup>68</sup>Special Asst. Agent to Agent, Visakhapatnam, 1 June 1918, G. O. 2263, Home (Jdl.), 5 Oct. 1918.

<sup>69</sup>Inspector-General to Chief Sec., 30 Apr. 1880, G. O. 125, Jdl., 23 July 1880.

<sup>70</sup>See the *muttadars'* statements in app. III of MJP, no. 111-C, 16 Jan. 1880.

<sup>71</sup>Sullivan to Chief Sec., 29 Sept. 1879, *ibid.*

he profited from the sale of drink and opium, from the exploitation of the forests. But not infrequently, too, the *muttadar* shared the grievances of other hillmen—indebtedness to the Malas and Komatis, rankling subordination to petty officials, interference from a meddling government. In a crisis the gap between the *muttadar* and the villagers of his *mutta* might matter less than their mutual grievances and common identity against outsiders. Because it was his traditional responsibility to lead and to defend his *mutta*, the hillmen looked to their *muttadar* for leadership. If he failed to provide it, they might force him to take up the leadership or turn violently against him.

Secondly, an important element in the transformation of the hill economy was the usurpation or erosion of hillmen's customary rights—to practise shifting cultivation, to make their own toddy and to collect produce from the forests. Here one can see a common feature of peasant revolts in times when their traditional socio-economic order is under attack, when capitalist classes are either emerging from within the society or intruding on it from outside. One finds precisely the same process at work in the peasant revolts of late-medieval Europe and of colonial Burma and Vietnam in the early twentieth century.<sup>72</sup> The Gudem-Rampa *fituris* were part of this almost universal pattern of defensive peasant movements.

#### *The Fituris of 1879-80 and 1886*

The second phase of the *fituris*, running from 1879 to 1916, was dominated by the massive rebellion with which the period began. This was directed against the mansabdar, the British and the trader contractors in Rampa and initially was led by *muttadars* and headmen, though it soon became more widespread especially among the *adivasis*. After a period of hesitation, during which the British hastily dropped the mansabdar whom they had supported for the past thirty years, the rising (the *fourth Rampa fituri*, 1879-80) exploded like spraying shrapnel, carried by bands of insurgents into neighbouring tracts until an area estimated at 5,000 square miles was in revolt.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>72</sup>Hilton, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-18; James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven, 1976), esp. ch. 4.

<sup>73</sup>Hemingway, *op. cit.*, p. 274.

The removal of the mansabdar, the redress of the most pressing of the hillmen's grievances, and the government's anxiety to avoid any actions that might rekindle revolt, saved Rampa from any further major *fituris*. In Gudem, however, it was a different story. The outbreak in Rampa in March 1879 detonated disturbances there too (the *third Gudem fituri*, 1879-80). In April 1879 a landholder named Chendrayya attacked Addatigala police station; and in March 1880 Tagi Virayya Dora, the *muttadar* of Gudem Patavidi, joined the revolt. A second outbreak occurred six years later (the *fourth Gudem fituri*, 1886). It was led by Jani Kakari, a dispossessed landholder, and supported by other discontented hillmen and their priests. In this rising religious elements played a greater part than in the others.

In yet another rising (the *fifth Gudem fituri*, 1891), Chinna Bhupati's son, Santa Bhupati, and Madakam Chinnigadu, a Koya who had participated in the 1879-80 rising, burnt Krishnadevipet police station. Santa Bhupati died of fever; Chinnigadu was captured. A period of relative quiescence followed. Disgusted at *muttadar* complicity or inertia during successive risings, the British resumed five of the Gudem *muttas* between 1886 and 1905, threatened the rest with extinction, and increased the area under ryotwari tenure. By 1914, however, government policy had swung around again as the likelihood of rebellion seemed to have receded<sup>74</sup> and as the *muttadars* were once more seen as indispensable intermediaries between the government and the hillmen. However, a further rising did occur (the *sixth Gudem fituri*, 1915-16). This, the Lagarayi *fituri*, began with a string of dacoities by a Koya-Kammar gang, but the sympathies of at least one *muttadar* were involved: in February 1917 Mottadam Virayya Dora, *muttadar* of Gudem Patavidi, was deported to Visakhapatnam for complicity in the rising.

It would be unduly repetitious to look at all of these *fituris*, and indeed detailed materials are not available for every one. It is intended, therefore, to examine the risings of 1879-80 and 1886 and to use them to illustrate the most important aspects of this second phase of the *fituris*.

In striking contrast to the apparent absence of religion in the disturbances of the 1839-62 period, the late-nineteenth-century risings contained several religious elements. In their character

<sup>74</sup>Agent to Sec., Jdl., 25 Feb. 1915, G. O. 2701, Jdl., 2 Nov. 1915.

these often resembled the messianic and millenarian movements that Stephen Fuchs has described elsewhere in India, especially among *adivasis*.<sup>75</sup> However, to categorize the beliefs of the rebellious hillmen of Rampa and Gudem as millennial is to run the danger of suggesting that these were fanciful dreams and visions remote from the practical problems of the inhabitants and their realistic expectations. But as Claude Lévi-Strauss has demonstrated, religion and myth are not devices by which tribesmen and peasants turn their backs on reality. On the contrary, they enable them to store information about the world around them and to rationalize the situations that confront them.<sup>76</sup> In the Eastern Ghats the function of religion may be said to have been two-fold. Firstly, it expressed the hillmen's dissatisfaction with their subjugation and offered a means by which they hoped for deliverance from oppression. Secondly, it gave them a new courage, a heightened sense of their common identity as hillmen; it forged a new solidarity that enabled them to fight their materially more powerful opponents.

One can see both these functions in the 1886 rising in Gudem. At the end of 1885 Potukuri Maladu, a Konda Dora priest (or Sivasari) and cultivator, was visited by Salabi Bodadu, a Sivasari from a neighbouring *mutta*. Bodadu said that god had appeared to him and assured him that the hill people would once again rule their country and that they would be successful if they rose in a *fituri* against the government. Bodadu also told Maladu that he had met the Pandavas in a jungle: they foretold success for the revolt and, as a token, gave him a cane which he showed to Maladu. Maladu consulted Murla Balayya, the munsif of Sadiki village and a Bagata, who gave his approval to a *fituri*. The cane was placed in Maladu's hut and worshipped.<sup>77</sup>

According to the Agent, Bodadu had been wandering about the hills from village to village 'like a man possessed' for the past two years, making 'certain mad prophecies' and saying that the gods favoured a *fituri*.<sup>78</sup> With the help of Potukuri Maladu, he gathered a band of about twenty Sivasaris and other Konda Doras and in

<sup>75</sup>Stephen Fuchs, *Rebellious Prophets: A Study of Messianic Movements in Indian Religions* (London, 1965). The *fituri* at Korravanivalsa, near Pachipenta in the Visakhapatnam Agency in 1900, perhaps most closely fits the millenarian model: see Agent to Chief Sec., 7 July 1901, G. O. 1371, Jdl., 2 Sept 1901.

<sup>76</sup>Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (London, 1972), pp. 16-17.

<sup>77</sup>Deposition of Potukuri Maladu, in G. O. 2601, Jdl., 29 Sept., 1886.

<sup>78</sup>Agent to Chief Sec., 17 Oct. 1886, G. O. 3080, Jdl., 18 Nov. 1886.



January 1886 they travelled through the hills of Padwa and Madugula, visiting shrines and seeking divine approval for a *fituri*. Among the sites visited was Matsya Gundum, a rock-pool on the sacred Macheru River near Paderu.<sup>79</sup> On their return they began to make preparations for the rising.

At this point two new characters entered the drama. One was Jani Kakari, a Konda Dora and former landholder from just below the ghats, whose involvement in the *fituri* will be looked at more closely later. The other was Rajanna Anantayya, a Telugu from Kasimkot in the plains. A 'regular rolling stone', he had been a teacher and a police constable (until his dismissal in 1872); he then drifted to Gudem Patavidi where he taught the sons of a *mokhasadar*. Perhaps, as with many such leaders, it was lack of worldly success which turned Anantayya towards millennial beliefs.<sup>80</sup> He joined the discontented hillmen at Sadiki claiming that he was Hanuman and would lead a *Rama Dundu* (Rama's Army) against the British. One of the young villagers, Surla Ramanna, partly through the suggestion of his name, was similarly taken up as an incarnation of Rama. As befitted deities, 'regular worship was paid to them', and hillmen from neighbouring villages came to make obeisance to them and perform pujas in their honour. When 'Sri Rama' spoke, he said that the days of the British were over and that the *muttadars* would regain their ancient authority.<sup>81</sup>

The appearance of 'Rama' and 'Hanuman' and the reference to Rama's Army were not the fanciful fiction of simple minds. The familiar story of Rama and the exploits of Hanuman in recovering Sita from the demon Ravana in Sri Lanka provided an apt analogy<sup>82</sup> with the hillmen's own situation. Like Hanuman, Anantayya would lead their liberating army or Rama Dundu against the enemy which had robbed them of their freedom and traditional ways of life. It is significant, too, that they spoke not in terms of

<sup>79</sup>Deputy Inspector-General, Northern Range, to Inspector-General, 22 Aug. 1886, G. O. 2601, Jdl., 29 Sept. 1886.

<sup>80</sup>Cf. the case of the Taiping leader, Hung Hsiu-ch'uan: Eugene F. Boardman, 'Millenary Aspects of the Taiping Rebellion (1851-64)', in Sylvia L. Thrupp (ed.), *Millennial Dreams in Action* (Hague, 1962), pp. 70-9.

<sup>81</sup>Deposition of Potukuri Maladu, in G. O. 2601, Jdl., 29 Sept. 1886; Agent to Chief Sec., 7 Aug. 1886, *ibid.*

<sup>82</sup>Lévi-Strauss, *op. cit.*, p. 20. For a comparable 'analogy' in which the peasants of Champaran in Bihar identified Gandhi with Rama, see Jacques Pouchepadass, 'Local Leaders and the Intelligentsia in the Champaran Satyagraha (1917): A Study in Peasant Mobilization', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 8 (1974), p. 83.

some idyllic heavenly kingdom on earth, but, more practically, of the restoration of their old lords, the *muttadars*. These symbols and analogies were sustained when the *fituri* began. On 16 June 1886 the rebels attacked Gudem police station, calling out that they were Rama's Army and with 'Govindu, Govindu' as their battle cry. Literate in Telugu, Anantayya wrote to the *muttadar* of Lamasingi seeking support: 'Hanumanlu has come to your mutta, under orders of Sri Ramulu. We have come to do you good and to protect you. Give us assistance by supplying us with the men required.'<sup>83</sup> And to the Maharaja of Jaipur, the premier zamindar of the Visakhapatnam hills, he wrote: 'If the assistance of men and arms are supplied to us, I will play the Ram's part.'<sup>84</sup>

In none of the other Gudem-Rampa *fituris* does the religious element appear as strongly as in the 1886 rising. This may in part reflect British ignorance about the beliefs of the hillmen during the risings and in the troubled months that preceded them and hence the poverty of the documentary sources on this aspect of the *fituris*. There is, however, material on the part that oaths and sacrifices played. These, too, appear to have had a dual function: firstly, sacrifices were made to appease wrathful gods and to invoke divine favour and assistance for the *fituridars*; secondly, as in many other peasant and tribal risings,<sup>85</sup> oaths and sacrifices created or sealed new bonds of loyalty and solidarity between fellow rebels or between a leader and his followers (especially where traditional community identities and loyalties seemed inadequate for the purpose).

Jani Kakari and the Sadiki hillmen made sacrifices before setting out to raid the house of his enemy Yella Venkiah; and again two weeks later, before their attack on Gudem police station, they sacrificed a buffalo, a goat and several chickens.<sup>86</sup> In the early stages of the Rampa rebellion in March 1879 one of the Koya leaders, Karam Tamman Dora, ritually executed two of the police captives with a sword. This was not simply revenge for police misdeeds in the past (though that motive was certainly present) nor just a precaution against their escaping. They were taken to

<sup>83</sup>Deputy Inspector-General to Inspector-General, 2 July 1886, G. O. 2601, Jdl., 29 Sept. 1886.

<sup>84</sup>Deputy Inspector-General to Inspector-General, 22 Aug. 1886, *ibid*.

<sup>85</sup>Cf., for example, the importance of oaths in the Mau Mau rising in East Africa or the secret societies of China.

<sup>86</sup>District Superintendent of Police, report, 3 July 1886, G. O. 2601, Jdl., 29 Sept. 1886.

the principal shrine at Rampa and sacrificed as offerings to the goddess Malveli.<sup>87</sup> This act had the additional importance that it committed the rebels to continuing their revolt: thereafter capture would result in trial for murder, perhaps summary execution. In a third instance, in March 1880 when the *muttadar* of Gudem Patavidi, Tagi Virayya Dora, joined the *fituri*, he took an oath, sealed by the sacrifice of five prisoners, to assist the rebels in attacking Kondakamberu police station.<sup>88</sup> And there were, in addition, other reports of ritual killings in the course of the Rampa rebellion.

Turning from the religious aspects of the risings to their leadership, it can be said that although personal grievance lay behind the hill chiefs' involvement, the atmosphere in the hills was so charged with the electricity of social discontent that individual acts of revenge and defiance readily escalated into broader revolts. In this respect the *fituris* of 1879-91 contrast with the essentially elite struggles of the earlier period. Indeed, in some cases the initiative for revolt came from the subaltern hillmen who forced leadership upon the reluctant *muttadars*.

Both these factors—elite instigation and popular initiative—can be seen in the Gudem *fituri* of 1886. Jani Kakari held land in Pesarada, a *mokhasa* village at the foot of the ghat, but in 1878 lands that he and his co-sharers in the *mokhasa* claimed as theirs were adjudged by the Principal Assistant Collector to belong to the neighbouring ryotwari village of Pallapunagandhorapalem. Shortly after this decision the Survey Department demarcated the boundary between the two villages in such a way as to deprive Kakari of still more of what he thought to be his land. Behind both these misfortunes he saw the hand of his rival, Yella Venkiah, an influential ryot of Pallapunagandhorapalem, who also had Kakari imprisoned for fifteen days for reaping the crop he had sown in a disputed field. Too poor to take his grievance to the courts and feeling, besides, that his enemy and the bureaucracy were conspiring against him, Kakari decided to avenge himself by murdering Venkiah. At the end of May 1886 he went to Sadiki where he had relatives and knew that discontent was brewing. He promised to join the *fituri* if the hillmen would first help him against Venkiah.

<sup>87</sup>Deposition of P. C. Boyanna Potti Reddi, in MJP, no. 17, 2 Apr. 1879; D. F. Carmichael's report, 1 Nov. 1881, G. O. 2562, Jdl., 14 Dec. 1881.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid.

This was agreed, sacrifices were made for the success of the expedition, and on 3 June Kakari and six men from Sadiki attacked Venkiah's house. They set it on fire and killed one of the servants, but failed to murder Venkiah, who by the light of his blazing house recognized Kakari. For the latter there could now be no turning back. Two weeks later he led the raid on Gudem police station and the government bungalow at Chintapalle.<sup>89</sup>

In his discussion of 'social banditry' Eric Hobsbawm has argued that it is possible to distinguish between those bandits who are regarded by peasants and lords alike as mere criminals and those who, though criminals in the eyes of the lord and state, are to the peasants heroes, champions, avengers and freedom fighters.<sup>90</sup> The distinction is attractive in the abstract, but elusive in reality. A term such as 'ambivalence' or 'ambiguity'<sup>91</sup> better characterizes the dual crime/protest character of many acts which the state and lords perceive not simply as crime, but also as a real or potential threat to their interests. For the propertied classes and the state even an isolated act of violence or theft might have a greater significance—an implicit challenge to their dominance which needs to be checked and punished before it can trigger other, perhaps more open, acts of crime and revolt. Conversely, for the subalterns, even a purely selfish theft or assault can, in the right situation of tension and underlying hostility to oppressors, assume the character of a gesture of defiance or revenge. Frequently, the very attempt of the lord or state to seize a thief, a dacoit or a murderer, is seen as an aggressive act by the subalterns, provoking a sense of solidarity and even causing a violent collective response. The converse of this is that if the police and other agents of the lord and the state fail to punish a crime or seize the perpetrators, other subalterns may be persuaded that the power of their masters has ebbed and that the moment has come for more open and determined defiance. In 1886 in Gudem local officials were slow to investigate the dacoity against Venkiah. The delay seemed to the hillmen confirmation of the rumours about the approaching demise of British control, a sign that, as the gods had promised, a *fituri*

<sup>89</sup>Agent to Chief Sec., 17 Oct 1886, G. O. 3080, Jdl., 18 Nov. 1886; report of the Police Superintendent, 3 July 1886, G. O. 2601, Jdl., 29 Sept. 1886.

<sup>90</sup>E. J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Manchester, 1959), ch. 2 and *Bandits* (London, 1969).

<sup>91</sup>Cf. Jean Chesneaux, *Peasant Revolts in China, 1840-1949* (London, 1973), p. 22.

would succeed. Thus emboldened, the Sadiki men attacked Gudem police station and some of the *muttadars* felt encouraged to give their support to the rising.

At times the *muttadars* did not act of their own free will, but had to be coerced into supporting a rising or allowing rebels to move unmolested through their *muttas*. Visakhapatnam's Agent wrote in 1895 that 'it is not to be expected of human nature that a single Muttadar suddenly confronted with a dozen budmashes [toughs] will do anything but tremble before them and do their bidding...'<sup>92</sup> But rebellion proceeded by stealthier means too. In 1886 Anantayya sent letters to the Maharaja of Jaipur and the *muttadar* of Lamasingi to ask for their support and to shame them for their meek acceptance of British control. They were also threatened with harm if they failed to help the rebels. The letter to the Maharaja was never despatched, but the *muttadar's* reply was cautious, respectful, and suitably couched in the Rama-Sita idiom. Unfortunately for him, it was not ambiguous enough: the British saw in it evidence of complicity in the rising and deprived him of his *mutta*. This case was exceptional in as much as the message was written down; but in many other *fituris* rumours and veiled threats forced *muttadars* into joining the risings or they felt obliged to do so by the mood of their villagers.

The 1879-80 rebellion was a complex amalgam of elite grievance and subaltern discontent. It began with caution and deliberation as a limited elite demonstration against the exactions of the mansabdar and his associates, the rentiers and the police. Since at least the beginning of March 1879, the *muttadars* had been meeting and testing support for an uprising. It was planned to attack Chodavaram (as the main British centre in the Rampa hills) and then to move against the other police stations in the tract. The discontented *muttadars* and headmen gathered on 10 March, but as one of their number was missing they delayed the attack until the 13th.<sup>93</sup> Hearing of the threatened disturbances, the District Superintendent of Police and the Sub-Collector, both Europeans, met five of the leaders at dawn on 13 March near Chodavaram. The hill chiefs explained their grievances over the drink taxes and the

<sup>92</sup>Agent to Chief Sec., 20 May 1895, G. O. 1685, Jdl., 10 Aug. 1895.

<sup>93</sup>District Superintendent of Police, Godavari, to Inspector-General, 14 Mar. 1879, MJP, no. 310, 25 Mar. 1879; Joint Magistrate, Chodavaram, to District Magistrate, 14 Mar. 1879, MJP, no. 311, 25 Mar. 1879.

exactions of the police. A second parley was to follow, but having prepared themselves for a more forceful demonstration and suspicious of British promises, the *muttadars* said that 'as they could not live, they might as well kill the constables and die'. They seized Chodavaram and took several policemen captive.<sup>94</sup>

With this act of defiance, followed two days later by the execution of two policemen, the *muttadars* crossed the borderline into open revolt. But they were by no means certain what course to follow next. They moved away from Chodavaram to the north-west: at Bandapalli on 15 March they persuaded the *muttadar* to join them. It was not until 15 April, over a month after the attack on Chodavaram, that they struck against Kota police station. At the end of March 1879 only six *muttadars* could be counted loyal to the government. But by early May the removal of the mansabdar and the *muttadars*' own uncertainties had shifted the balance: some surrendered voluntarily, others fell captive.<sup>95</sup> Up to this point, therefore, the *fituri* was slow-moving, largely elite managed, and contained within central Rampa.

But, as in many peasant risings, the first hesitant phase gave way to a second, more aggressive and popular, wave of rebellion. The defiance of government authority by the chiefs and the failure of the police and troops to strike effectively against the rebels allowed the revolt to spread and gather momentum. One can isolate three particular factors associated with the development of this second wave—the ineffectiveness of government counter-measures, the emergent leadership of Tamman Dora, and the detonation of secondary revolts on the periphery of Rampa.

Unprepared for a major rising, the government was slow in moving troops and police into the Agency. Even before the rains began in May, the mobility and striking power of the government forces were being hampered by the old problems of external control—too few roads, no detailed maps or reliable guides, the debilitating effect of climate and disease on troops unaccustomed to the hills, and the reluctance of villagers to give the government any assistance. The Joint Magistrate for Rampa reported in the middle of May 1879 that the whole country was 'passively, if not openly, hostile' to the British, who were unable either to punish

<sup>94</sup>Ibid.

<sup>95</sup>District Magistrate to Chief Sec., 29 Mar. 1879, MJP, no. 57, 8 Apr. 1879; 23 Apr. 1879; MJP, no. 98, 8 May 1879; MJP, no. 353, 31 May 1879.

those who helped the rebels or to protect loyal hillmen from the *fituridars*. 'Any village which in any way assists us is looted, burnt, and its headmen carried off in handcuffs by Tamman Dora, or some of his men. . . ' By contrast, 'villages openly and notoriously hostile . . . remain unharmed . . . No wonder that they [the rebels] get all the information and assistance they require, while we on the other hand get none'.<sup>96</sup>

Who was Tamman Dora? Almost certainly he was a relative of the Karam Tamman Dora who had been so prominent in the 1840-8 disturbances in Rampa. The first Tamman Dora had been *muttadar* of Bandapalli, one of the two Koya *muttadar* families in the tract. The second Tamman Dora was not one of his sons, but may have been a nephew. He was not a *muttadar* himself, but he and a brother, Karam Potti Dora, came from the village of Bhupatipalem near Chodavaram where they were probably joint holders of a *mokhasa*. Tamman Dora was not, therefore, in the first rank of hill chiefs, but as a junior member of the élite he enjoyed some of its authority. There is no record of any personal grievance to explain his participation in the *fituri*, but perhaps the example of his namesake inspired his defiance of the mansabdar and the British. Moreover, as a Koya he was closer to the *adivasi* hillmen than the initial Bagata rebel *muttadars*. It was as a Koya hero, as much as a daring and avenging *fituridar*, that he emerged as the rebellion's dominant personality. It was in Tamman Dora's name that other men fought and plundered.

Tamman Dora was not listed among the original rebels, nor was he at the dawn parley at Chodavaram. (Was it for him that the *muttadars* waited on 10 March? Was he too belligerent to participate in the peace talks on the 13th?) But he was soon spoken of as the leader of the *fituri*. By his execution of the two policemen on 16 March he demonstrated his stature among the rebels and his determination to pursue the *fituri* to the end rather than negotiate and compromise with the British. The following day, 17 March, his village was burnt by the police as a warning to other *fituridars*. Like Kakari's attack on his enemy in June 1886, these two incidents irrevocably committed Tamman Dora to the rebellion. There was, besides, soon a price on his head. By mid-April, when many other rebel leaders were wavering, Tamman Dora was reported to

<sup>96</sup>Joint Magistrate, Chodavaram, to District Magistrate, 15 May 1879, MJP, no. 32, 5 June 1879.

be 'desperate' and threatening to murder villagers and burn their homes if they did not join him.<sup>97</sup> A month later he was said to be at the head of a hundred *fituridars*, twice or thrice the number that usually made up a dacoit or rebel band in the hills.

As police and troops gradually regained control of central Rampa, Tamman Dora and his followers crossed into Rekapalle where the *fituri* was already blazing fiercely. He spent part of August and September 1879 there, returning briefly in February 1880. After lying low for the winter, in April 1880 he burst through the police cordon along the Sileru River on the northern border of Rampa. The Koyas of Malakanagiri, stirred up by their own experience of police oppression and by news of the rebellion in Rampa, greeted Tamman Dora as their hero and liberator. At the head of an army of several hundred *adivasis* he advanced through Malakanagiri and attacked the police station at Podeh on 24 April. Success in this and other skirmishes with the police further enhanced his reputation: he was now hailed as the 'Raja' of Malakanagiri. But within a few weeks, even before the rains transformed every valley into a quagmire, the police snatched back the initiative and drove Tamman Dora and his depleted band back into the jungle fastnesses of the Rekapalle-Rampa border. There, on 25 July 1880, he was tracked down and shot by the police. His head, pickled in carbolic oil, was taken back to Rajahmundry for identification by relatives—and to dispel rumours that he was still alive.<sup>98</sup>

But that was not quite the end of Tamman Dora's part in the rebellion. His name remained a magic with which other *fituridars* still conjured, invoking it as the authority for their actions, claiming that he would return to punish traitors. The vulnerability of the British and Tamman Dora's mobility and daring, also tempted other discontented hillmen to rebel. The Gudem *muttadars*, who 'still fretted against the restrictions which had been placed upon their powers . . .', saw in the outbreak of the Rampa rebellion an opportunity to settle their own scores against the police.<sup>99</sup> Chekka Venkam Dora, *muttadar* of Dutcharti, did not take up arms himself, but he encouraged Dwarabhandam Chendrayya, a 'man of some

<sup>97</sup>District Magistrate to Chief Sec., 18 Apr. 1879, MJP, no. 110, 9 May 1879.

<sup>98</sup>Carmichael's report, 1 Nov. 1881, G. O. 2662, Jdl., 14 Dec. 1881; no. 64, MJP, 14 Aug. 1880.

<sup>99</sup>Hemingway, *op. cit.*, p. 285.



substance' in the *mutta*, to do so. When Chendrayya's house was searched in his absence by police looking for evidence of a dacoity, he responded by gathering two hundred men, burning Addatigala police station on 8 May 1879, and then marching boldly across Rampa to join Tamman Dora.<sup>100</sup> With a 'daring dacoit' named Jampa Pandayya, he advanced into Rekapalle in August 1879, but, on returning to Rampa, he was betrayed by Pandayya and shot.<sup>101</sup> Here, once again, the interconnection between dacoity and *fituri* is striking.

Tagi Virayya Dora, *muttadar* of Gudem Patavidi and a 'man of great local influence', had been secretly helping the *fituridars* for months until the probability of his arrest and confiscation of his *mutta* drove him into open revolt at the end of March 1880. His career as a *fituridar* was short: he was shot by the police on 7 October 1880 before he could fulfil his pledge to attack Kondakamberu police station.<sup>102</sup> Not all the leading *fituridars* were *muttadars* or even from the elite. Yallaguru Jaggayya was a hunter and 'a man of no importance in Rampa'. He was summoned by Chendrayya to join the *fituri* and promised three villages as a reward. On Chendrayya's death, Jaggayya led a band of rebels from Gudem into neighbouring Madugula in February 1880 and attacked Paderu police station. He claimed that Chendrayya was still alive and following with an avenging army of five hundred men. After clashes with the police on 9 March, Jaggayya retreated across Gudem to Juddangi where he was shot by a European police inspector in November 1880. As he died he told the inspector: 'I was a shikari and very seldom did I miss my game.'

The spread of the rebellion into Rekapalle sprang directly from forest grievances. The new regulations were strictly enforced in Rekapalle by an unpopular forestry officer called Yezzu Krishnayya. One of the men called by the tahsildar (at Krishnayya's instigation) to answer charges of violating the regulations was Kondla Bhima Reddi, a Bagata village proprietor. In a pattern that was classic in the making of a south Indian dacoit, Bhima Reddi

<sup>100</sup>Carmichael's report, 1 Nov. 1881, G. O. 2562, Jdl., 14 Dec. 1881; Agent, Visakhapatnam, teleg. to Govt., 9 May. 1879, MJP, no. 137, 10 May 1879.

<sup>101</sup>Agent to Chief Sec., 24 May 1879, MJP, no. 33, 5 June 1879; *Madras Police Administration Report, 1880* (Madras, 1881), p. 1.

<sup>102</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 2; Carmichael's report, 1 Nov. 1881, G. O. 2562, Jdl., 14 Dec. 1881.

<sup>103</sup>District Superintendent of Police, Godavari, to Inspector-General, 13 Nov. 1880, MJP, no. 86, 29 Nov. 1880; Carmichael's report, 1 Nov. 1881, G. O. 2562, Jdl., 14 Dec. 1881.

ignored the summons and then, when a warrant was issued for his arrest, fled into the jungle. Hearing of the rebellion in Rampa, he crossed to Bodaluru to seek the help of Ambala Reddi, his relative and the *muttadar's* son. In return he promised loot. Bhima Reddi arrived back in Rekapalle with a band of fifty men and quickly attracted local support from Bagatas and Koyas incensed by the new forest regulations. On 16 July nearly a thousand rebels attacked the steamer *Shamrock* on its way up the Godavari from Rajahmundry with troops. Bhima Reddi and Ambala Reddi then crossed the Sabari River to attack a police station. In August they were joined by Tamman Dora and Chendrayya.<sup>104</sup> It is not clear what subsequently became of Bhima Reddi, but in October 1880 a mixed band of Koyas, Bagatas and Kammars returned to Rekapalle and were not rounded up until late December.<sup>105</sup> With this episode the *fituri* finally ended. It was twenty-two months since the first act of restrained defiance at Chodavaram in March 1879.

In this and most other *fituris* of the period police stations were the rebels' main targets. In an area where the government's presence was new and still weak, police stations were conspicuous citadels of intrusive state power. They represented the tyranny of the police themselves as well as the protection they extended to the money-lenders, traders and contractors. Few of the policemen were from the hills (and those from the Oriya tracts); the rest were Muslims, Christians and Telugu plains Hindus, men clearly set apart from hill society. Because the morale of the police was low and they had been unsettled by rumours long before the hillmen arrived with bows and arrows to attack them, the police stations fell to the rebels with remarkable ease. The stations were almost the only source of firearms available to the rebels: once taken, police carbines and ammunition greatly enhanced their strength in subsequent encounters with the police and troops. To seize and burn a police station, to brandish weapons or to don the uniforms of the vanquished constables, was a spectacular inversion of the oppression hillmen had so recently suffered: they were on top now and it was the policemen who begged for their lives to be spared.<sup>106</sup>

<sup>104</sup>Ibid.

<sup>105</sup>Special Asst. Agent to Agent, Godavari, 29 Oct 1880, MJP, no. 62, 17 Jan. 1881; Carmichael's report, 1 Nov. 1881, G. O. 2562, Jdl., 14 Dec. 1881.

<sup>106</sup>Inversion is a common feature of peasant movements. It expresses the peasants' desire to turn their existing world upside down. It also reflects their incapacity for real revolutionary, that is structural, change. For inversion at work, see 'Report of an Investigation of

Since neither the mansabdar nor the Komatis actually lived in the hills it was impossible for the rebels to attack them in person. There are surprisingly few references, too, to Malas being murdered during the *fituris*—perhaps they fled at the first sign of trouble. But it is significant that when the rebels returned to Rekapalle in October 1880 they killed Malas and members of another untouchable caste (Dandasis) that had gained influence and moderate wealth from its association with the colonial administration. The rebels repeatedly told the villagers: 'It is not good to have Pariahs living with you.' Muslims, shepherds and informers were also singled out for violent treatment, the Muslims because they were seen as foreigners, the shepherds because their occupation gave them opportunities to spy on villagers and rebel bands, and to report to the British. With characteristic discrimination, the *fituridars* rarely harmed *adivasis*. 'Beyond abusing some Koyas for giving supplies to the Government,' it was reported, 'and treating them in a high-handed way with big words and blows in assertion of the sovereignty they profess to claim over these parts, the *fituridars* in no way molested the generality of the people.'<sup>107</sup>

There was, no doubt, some ambivalence in the villagers' attitude towards the rebels. The government claimed that the *fituridars* raided villages for their supplies and compelled villagers to assist them. Clearly there was some compulsion and reprisals against villages that passed on information to the British or whose *muttadar* opposed the rising. The mood of the villagers varied and towards the end of the rebellion, as the *fituridars* in their desperation became more and more like dacoits, stealing and killing in order to survive, many villagers (and even relatives) turned against them and handed them over to the police. But during the early and middle phases of the Rampa rebellion the rebels appear to have enjoyed the approval, if not the active support, of most hillmen. Common antagonism to the government and its agencies was an important element in this. As one official reported in October 1880, many villagers had 'an intuitive and very comprehensible leaning towards their fellows, who, bolder than themselves, have set Government at defiance'.<sup>108</sup> The exactions of the mansabdar and

the Peasant Movement in Hunan', *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (Peking, 1975), I, *passim*, esp. pp. 28, 30, 36-7.

<sup>107</sup> Special Asst. Agent to Agent, Godavari, 16 Oct. 1880, MJP, no. 63, 17 Jan 1881.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

the contractors had already driven many hillmen into the jungles before the rebellion began, and from these were drawn the first rebel gangs. There can be no doubt, too, that when Tamman Dora arrived in Malakanagiri, or Bhima Reddi swept into Rekapalle, there was an upsurge of mass enthusiasm and that this forged an identification with the leaders that survived police reprisals and the temptation of rewards. It was said of the rebel *muttadar* of Gudem Patavidi that many villagers continued to help him secretly 'notwithstanding the number of persons who have been punished for so doing'.<sup>109</sup>

But although the rebels of 1879-80 enjoyed a large degree of popular support, the rebellion did not generally take the form of a mass uprising or jacquerie. For this two explanations can be offered. Firstly, a mass movement was not necessary to oust the British and their associates from the hills. It needed only a small band of rebels to seize a weakly defended police station, and the *fituridars* seem never to have considered carrying their rebellion to the plains. They sought only to eject the 'foreigners' from their hills; their sense of territoriality did not extend into the lowlands. They had limited objectives—to expel the intruders and oppressors, to punish traitors and to restore the hills to the control of hillmen—and small roving bands were best able to achieve these aims. Secondly, it would have been impossible to feed and shelter larger forces. The villages were small and poor, their supplies of grain limited. Travelling on foot, the *fituridars* could not carry much with them, or, if they attempted to do so, they would forfeit the advantages of speed and mobility which they enjoyed over the police and troops. Writing about the rebels' incursion into Rekapalle in October 1880, one official explained that they did not seek a general rising 'because they knew very well that the villagers were busy with their crops . . . and that if they interrupted the cultivation they would not only create a hostile spirit against themselves, but would cut off the very sources of the supplies that they would require in the event of a second visit later on . . .'<sup>110</sup>

<sup>109</sup>Officer Commanding Troops in Rampa to Quarter-Master-General, Ootacamund, 24 July 1880, MJP, no. 31, 9 Aug. 1880.

<sup>110</sup>Special Asst. Agent to Agent, Godavari, 16 Oct. 1880, MJP, no. 63, 17 Jan. 1881.

*Rama Raju's Fituri, 1922-4*

In many respects Rama Raju's rebellion (the *seventh Gudem fituri*, 1922-4) followed the pattern set by the earlier ones and so it is unnecessary to detail once again points already made. Restrictions on *podu* and the hillmen's access to the forest, and the petty tyranny of subordinate government officials again accounted for much of the background discontent. Ex-*muttadars*, dispossessed landholders and outlaws once again constituted an important leadership element: police stations were, as usual, a main target for attack. The rains, fever, and difficult terrain, the help villagers gave to the rebels and withheld from the government—these were as much a feature of this *fituri* as of previous ones. What is of particular interest about this final *fituri* is the extent to which there was a new departure. To what extent was Rama Raju, an outsider from the plains, able to adapt the *fituri* tradition so as to make a rising in the hills a starting point or a war of national liberation against the British?

Accounts of Alluri Sita Rama Raju's life vary slightly, but according to one official report he was born in Bhimavaram taluk, Krishna district, in May 1898. He was a Telugu Kshatriya; his father was a travelling photographer and his uncle (by the time of the rising) a deputy collector. He was educated to the fourth form at Visakhapatnam. According to this account he did not go to the Agency until 1918;<sup>111</sup> but Venkatarangaiya says that he was born in 1897 and went to the Agency at the age of eighteen, which would be in 1915.<sup>112</sup> If so, then Rama Raju may have seen something of the Lagarayi *fituri* of 1915-16. Even if he did not witness it in person the hills must still have echoed with rumours and reports of the *fituri* when he arrived.

Rama Raju travelled in the Gudem hills as a sanyasi and, according to Venkatarangaiya, his 'austerity and his knowledge of astrology and medicine and his reputed ability to tame wild animals gained for him the respect and admiration of the tribal people who credited him with magical powers'.<sup>113</sup> The British thought him mentally unbalanced and 'bordering on insanity' for

<sup>111</sup>Report of A. J. Happell, 21 Apr. 1923, G. O. 572, Public, 23 July 1923.

<sup>112</sup>Venkatarangaiya (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 79.

<sup>113</sup>Loc. cit.

his intense and unreasoning hatred of any thing British but then conceded that the hillmen believed him 'possessed by God'.<sup>114</sup> Before the rising and during it, Rama Raju made repeated use of the sorts of religious sanctions we have encountered in previous *fituris*. He bound his followers by oaths and (a bureaucratic innovation) recorded them in a book with the hillmen's mark or thumbprint alongside. He paid frequent visits to hill temples and shrines.<sup>115</sup> Following his early successes against the police, he claimed to be invulnerable to police bullets and attributed victory to divine support.<sup>116</sup> It may be, too, that his very name evoked in the hillmen the same associations with the Rama-Sita-Hanuman story that had figured in the 1886 *fituri*. That earlier rising also offers a precedent for the involvement of an outsider in the hillmen's *fituris*, and in both Anantayya and Rama Raju's cases it is striking that religion provided the means by which men from the plains could identify themselves with the grievances and aspirations of the local population. But whereas Anantayya was a 'rolling stone' who projected his own frustrations and ambitions onto the hillmen's revolt against their oppressors, Rama Raju seems always to have been concerned to use the hills as a base for launching a military movement to liberate India from British rule. In this respect he showed something of the romantic idealism of his class, rather than the more limited and local aims of the other *fituridars*.

In 1921 Rama Raju went on a pilgrimage to Nasik in Maharashtra, and it was perhaps in the course of this journey that he came into contact with the Gandhian movement. On returning to Gudem, he began to preach temperance and to urge the hillmen to settle disputes through their own panchayats rather than through the British courts. He adopted *khadi* and was said to speak highly of Gandhi, but to believe that Indian independence could be attained only by force. Such an attitude was in keeping with his own Kshatriya traditions—just as during the *fituri* he dyed his *khadi* shirt red and tucked a police pistol in his captured Sam Browne belt—as well as with the hillmen's heritage of a defiant and avenging *fituri*.

<sup>114</sup>Häppell's report, 21 Apr. 1923, G. O 572, Public, 23 July 1923; Special Commnr. for Agency Operations to Chief Sec., 22 Aug. 1922, in Venkatarangaya (ed.), op. cit., p. 367.

<sup>115</sup>Loc. cit.; Häppell's report, 21 Apr. 1923, G. O 572, Public, 23 July 1923

<sup>116</sup>Intercepted letter, 16 Sept. 1922, in Venkatarangaya (ed.), op. cit., p. 370; Deputy Tahsildar, Malakanagiri, to Agency Commnr., 13 June 1923, *ibid.*, p. 388.

The British claimed that Rama Raju sought to establish his own hill kingdom, but he does not seem to have adopted any regal titles and it was as a sanyasi, perhaps as a prophet armed, rather than as a king, that he was revered and followed.

Alerted by his new preaching, officials in the hills began to fear that Rama Raju might lead a new *fituri*, and in January 1922 he was put under police surveillance. This may have convinced Rama Raju that he would have to act quickly before the police arrested and imprisoned him. He began to promise hillmen redress for their various grievances especially against Bastian, the hated tahsildar of Gudem. He also carefully built up support among discontented and dispossessed members of the elite, men of the type that had provided the *fituris* of the past with so many of their leaders. One such was the *ex-muttadar* of Gudem Patavidi. The heads of this *mutta* had been active in almost every *fituri* since the 1840s. In consequence, they had been deposed and their line excluded from the succession until a shift in government policy brought about their restoration. *Muttadar* Sobilan Dora was deported from the Agency for his complicity in the 1891 rising; his son, Mottadam Virayya Dora, was exiled to Vizianagaram for his part in the Ligarayai *fituri* of 1915-16 and the *mutta* transferred to a new lineage. But, it was reported as late as 1923, the inhabitants of the *mutta* were still attached to the old line, of which Virayya Dora was the last representative, and the new *muttadar* had 'no influence whatever'. In 1922 Virayya escaped from Vizianagaram and stirred up support for his claim to the *mutta* before being recaptured and taken to the police lock-up at Rajavomangi in eastern Rampa. From there he was rescued by Rama Raju on 24 August 1922 and he joined the rebels until he again fell into the hands of the police on 3 September 1922.<sup>117</sup> No other *muttadar* was so deeply involved as Virayya Dora, but the *muttadar* of Makaram was jailed for two years and his *mutta* resumed for harbouring rebels, and two others were suspended for helping them.<sup>118</sup>

Rama Raju's closest associates during the *fituri* were the brothers Gam Mallu Dora and Gam Gantam Dora. They had formerly been joint holders of lands in Battupanakulu, a village in Makaram *mutta* of which Gantam Dora had been headman. Like many other

<sup>117</sup>Happell's report, 21 Apr. 1923, G. O. 572, Public, 23 July 1923, and endorsement by Agency Commr., 15 May 1923.

<sup>118</sup>Commr. to Sec., Rev., 25 June 1923, G. O. 1347, Rev., 5 Sept. 1923.

hillmen of the *mutta*, Gantam Dora had mortgaged his lands and was threatened in 1917 by the Special Assistant Agent with their confiscation unless he redeemed them promptly. When he failed to do so, his lands were resumed and granted (along with the headmanship) to Summarla Valasayya Dora. Gantam Dora appealed, in vain, to the Agent against this decision, then tried to obstruct the transfer of the lands. When all these attempts had failed, the Gam brothers turned to Rama Raju to revenge themselves on their enemies and to recover their lands. The Agency Commissioner noted in May 1923 that the brothers 'possessed considerable influence in the *mutta*, though the influence was due rather to fear than to popularity'. In them Rama Raju had recruited 'two influential hillmen who had no great respect for law and order and who were smarting under what they considered was an injustice'.<sup>119</sup>

A comparable case was that of Yendu Padal, headman of Peddavalasa village. He was given the contract to build a ghat road by the tehsildar, but when the work was completed Bastian refused to pay on the grounds that it had been done badly and demanded the return of the Rs 100 advance. It was alleged, however, that Yendu Padal was already virtual head of the *mutta* of Peddavalasa (formerly called Gudem Kotavidi), and had been promised the succession by Bastian if the road were built without payment. The tehsildar then reneged on this promise by installing the legitimate heir instead.<sup>120</sup>

Through the influence of these lieutenants Rama Raju attracted a motley band of old *fituridars*, ex-convicts, landless 'budmashes', men fined for forest and grazing offences, and dispossessed petty landholders. As the *fituri* gathered momentum and as the small rebel bands roved the hills, headmen and other villagers were drawn into the rising by supplying them with food, shelter and information about police movements.<sup>121</sup> Without this assistance the *fituridars* would not have been able to evade the elaborate measures devised for their capture and to sustain the rebellion for nearly two years. Rama Raju did not inspire such massive demonstrations of popular support as those aroused by Tamman Dora and Bhima Reddi at the height of the Rampa rebellion, but the govern-

<sup>119</sup>Commnr.'s endorsement, 15 May 1923, G. O. 572, Public, 23 July 1923.

<sup>120</sup>Happell's report, 21 Apr. 1923, *ibid.*

<sup>121</sup>Venkataramangaiya (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp 368-9, 380. On 19 Jan. 1923, for example, 8 headmen and 10 villagers were convicted for harbouring rebels and giving false information: Happell's report, 21 Apr. 1923, G. O. 572, Public, 23 July 1923.



ment's attempts to crush the rebels were foiled by the villagers' reluctance to cooperate with the authorities. The imposition of a punitive police tax in March 1923 was a serious government error as it confirmed villagers' hostility to the administration without deterring them from helping the *fituridars*.

Rama Raju tried to develop the raiding and reprisals of earlier *fituris* into a more sophisticated form of guerilla warfare. The raids on Chintapalle, Krishnadevipet and Rajavomangi between 22 and 24 August 1922 brought into the rebels' hands a rich haul of police arms and ammunition. With 26 muskets and 2,500 rounds of ammunition, Rama Raju's followers were better armed than the rebels in previous *fituris* and, the government conceded, better led.<sup>122</sup> Rama Raju followed his initial raids with two successful ambushes: in the first of these two European police officers and four Indian subordinates were killed, and six .303 rifles and a pistol were captured.<sup>123</sup> A number of rebels were subsequently seen in captured police uniforms, perhaps because Rama Raju wanted to dress his men up as soldiers, but it was also another expression of the triumphant inversion of roles between the hillmen and their former oppressors.

Unlike the leaders of previous *fituns*, Rama Raju sought to carry the rebellion into the plains, though, in actuality, government counter-measures cordoned off the hills and prevented him from spreading the revolt beyond the area of the 1879-80 rising. His base area, to which he retired for months at a time, lay in the back country between Peddavalasa, Gudem and Darakonda. The initial raids of September and October 1922 took Rama Raju as far west as Chodavaram, but there was little support for the rebels in Rampa and the *muttadars* there remained loyal to the government. In June 1923 Rama Raju crossed into Malakanagiri; in September he advanced north-west as far as Paderu in Madugula before being driven back by the police. It was during a second sally into Madugula that Rama Raju was captured and shot on 6 May 1924.<sup>124</sup>

Rama Raju's inability to extend the *fitun* beyond Gudem and the neighbouring hills was not just a military failure. It also demonstrated the difficulty of trying to enlarge the *fituri* tradition beyond

<sup>122</sup>Chief Sec., Madras, to Sec., Home, Govt. of India, Home Dept., Pol., 898 of 1922, NAI, New Delhi; Happell's report, 21 Apr 1923, G. O. 572, Public, 23 July 1923

<sup>123</sup>Agency Commr. to Chief Sec., 26 Aug 1922, in Venkatarangaya (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 372-3.

<sup>124</sup>See narrative in *ibid.*, pp. 80-91.

the hillmen's natural territory to encompass a national war of liberation. There had, of course, been strong anti-foreigner elements in earlier *fituris*, especially that of 1886. But then the aim had been only to drive the outsiders from the hills, not to seek to expel them from the plains as well or to identify the rising in the hills with a broader struggle of Indians against British. It is striking how successful Rama Raju was in impressing upon his lieutenants and followers that their war was against the white men, not against fellow Indians (Bastian would appear to have been made an exception). Although it went against the *fituri* tradition, there was a deliberate policy of killing only European officers and sparing their Indian subordinates. When the latter fell into rebel hands they were humiliated but not punished more severely. The old laws of discrimination (hillmen against outsiders) had been temporarily overruled.<sup>125</sup> But since the rebellion never spread beyond the hillmen's territory it is impossible to say how far Rama Raju would have been successful in linking the hillmen with Indian nationalists in the plains.

The evidence from the other side—of the plainsmen's attitude to the *fituri*—is almost wholly negative. Rama Raju tried to recruit fellow Kshatriyas and Congressmen from the plains of Andhra Pradesh, but only one Kshatriya, Aggi Raju, joined him.<sup>126</sup> The Congressmen not only declined to join the *fituri*: they threw their weight against it. Attachment to Gandhian non-violence provides a ready explanation for this attitude. The Telugu nationalist paper, *Andhra Patrika*, wrote on 17 May 1924 that the *fituri* was 'another illustration to show that violence is quite a useless weapon. Hence all will do well to adopt the excellent non-violent non-cooperation preached by Mr. Gandhi.'<sup>127</sup> But a more basic reason for the hostility of the Andhra Congressmen was that they represented precisely those interests—the traders, money-lenders, contractors, immigrant cultivators, and lawyers—whose hold on the hills the *fituridars* were fighting to overthrow. They had, moreover, the same contempt for the 'rude Koyas' that had been exhibited by the memorialists against the Agency Land and Interest Act in 1917.<sup>128</sup> To the nationalists of the plains the only useful

<sup>125</sup>See *ibid.*, pp. 382-9.

<sup>126</sup>Letter to Pericherla Suryanarayana Raju (alias Aggi Raju), *ibid.*, pp. 370-1, and narrative, pp. 88, 91.

<sup>127</sup>Cited in *ibid.*, p. 401.

<sup>128</sup>*Guntur Patrika*, cited in *ibid.*, p. 389; cf. p. 30.

function of the *fituri* was the opportunities it presented to make political capital from the government's blundering attempts to suppress it.<sup>129</sup> For them Rama Raju's rebellion was an anachronism: it held no key to India's political future.

### Conclusion

Over the course of the period 1839 to 1924 the *fituris* of the Eastern Ghats passed through three phases. In the first phase, they were primarily elite conflicts between external powers, attempting to extend their control from the plains into the hills, and the *muttadars*, seeking to preserve their independence and privileges. There is little evidence of popular participation in these early *fituris*, except in the abandonment of villages in the path of invading forces and raiding. At this stage of relations between the hills and the plains, the hillmen generally had the upper hand against the invaders. The terrain, the climate, the general hostility of the population, the paucity of exploitable resources, all helped to save the hillmen from more effective control.

From the middle of the nineteenth century the relationship was changing, tilting in favour of the invaders from the plains, and the character of the *fituns* showed a corresponding shift. Backed by the power of the police and law courts, facilitated by the construction of roads, and spurred by the realization that the hills now had attractive economic resources to offer, outsiders began to penetrate the hill tracts and to undermine the hillmen's traditional economy and society. Both elite and subaltern hillmen were affected by this transformation. The *muttadars* continued to play a major role in the leadership of the risings, but pressure for a rising now sometimes came from the subalterns. The *fituns* took on a more popular character than formerly, especially in the widespread Rampa rebellion of 1879-80. As in many other parts of the world where a traditional society has found itself under attack from aggressive modern imperialism and capitalism, the reaction of the hillmen took two main forms. Firstly, there was the religious element (often characterized as millennialism or messianism), consisting of a wide variety of fears and expectations couched in religious terms. This religious idiom gave the hillmen a frame-

<sup>129</sup>See the debates in the *Madras Legislative Council Proceedings*, 17 Mar. 1923, vol. XII, pp. 2516-30; 25 Mar. 1924, vol. XVII, pp. 1136-61.

work within which to conceptualize their predicament and to seek solutions to it. Religion, however syncretic, provided a basis for solidarity against outsiders. Secondly, there was the crime-as-protest element, which approximates to what Hobsbawm has called 'social banditry', but which includes a greater range of supposedly criminal activities than banditry. Because of the shared sense of grievance among the hillmen, an individual crime or act of revenge was interpreted as a gesture of defiance against all outsiders and oppressors. Ambivalence best describes this fluidity between crime and protest.

The third phase of the *fituris* represents the attempt by outside idealists, opportunists and dissidents to convert the expanded *fituri* tradition of the second phase into a popular movement that could be extended into the plains. In the Rampa and Gudem tracts there was only one clear case of this—Rama Raju's *fituri* of 1922-4—though one might see a precedent for this in Anantayya's involvement in the 1886 rising in Gudem. Rama Raju believed that a rebellion begun in the hills could become the base for a war of national liberation against the British. There were no subsequent attempts to use the *fituri* tradition in this way in the Gudem and Rampa hills, but the pattern recurred in the late 1960s with the attempts by Naxalite communists to mobilize hillmen as the initial phase of rural insurrection and revolution in India. Srikakulam in Visakhapatnam was one of the centres of Naxalite activity in 1968-9, an area which had its own history of participation in the *fituris* of the Eastern Ghats. While risings of this type were often able to mobilize hillmen through their enduring sense of grievance and hostility to outsiders, they were gravely inhibited by the tribals' or hillmen's restricted territoriality.

Territoriality—the peasant's identification with that small territory that encompasses almost all his economic, social and cultural ties and beyond which he begins to feel himself a stranger—has been a powerful factor in inhibiting peasant involvement in broader political movements. It takes an exceptional set of circumstances—a flood or famine that drives him from his home, the ravages of armies, the confident belief in an imminent millennium—to lift him more than momentarily out of his intense commitment to his locality. Equally, peasant xenophobia has been a persistent factor in opposition to those outsiders who arrive to tax, to exploit, to practise their foreign faiths, to rule. Territori-

ality and xenophobia are to be found in many, if not most, peasant struggles in India, but they are particularly acute in the risings and rebellions of the hillmen of India, where such identities and aversions are reinforced by the cohesiveness of communities that have remained relatively isolated, the limited social differentiation they often exhibit, and above all by that exceptionally sharp divide between those who live in the hills and those who inhabit the plains. In this respect then, the Gudem and Rampa *fituris* represent an emphatic expression of the patterns of peasant protest and subaltern resistance found elsewhere in India, but not a wholly atypical one. Certainly it should no longer be assumed that the rebellious hillmen of Gudem, Rampa and countless other hill tracts like them were irrelevant and unimportant in the unfolding story of modern India's political and social history.

# Peasant Revolt and Indian Nationalism: The Peasant Movement in Awadh, 1919-22

GYAN PANDEY

In January 1921 the peasants of Awadh burst onto the national stage in India. Huge peasant demonstrations at Fursatganj and Munshiganj bazars in Rae Bareilly district led to police firing on 6 and 7 January. At other places in Rae Bareilly, Faizabad and Sultanpur districts, peasant violence—the looting of bazars (as at Fursatganj), attacks on landlords, and battles with the police—broke out around this time. For some weeks, indeed, many a landlord was too scared to appear anywhere on his estate. 'You have seen in three districts in southern Oudh [Awadh] the beginnings of something like revolution', Harcourt Butler, the Governor of UP (the United Provinces of Agra and Awadh, modern Uttar Pradesh), observed in March 1921.<sup>1</sup> The peasants' actions received wide publicity in the nationalist press, too, especially after Jawaharlal Nehru had been drawn into the Munshiganj events of 7 January.

Virtually for the first time since 1857 the Awadh peasant had forced himself on the attention of the elites in colonial India. The debate was quickly joined. The leaders of the major nationalist party, the Congress, who had been involved in some of the peasant meetings and demonstrations of the preceding months, now stepped forward to defend the peasants in the courts and to prevent further violence. Colonial administrators rushed to consider remedial legislation: 'It has for long been obvious', as one of them put it, 'that the Oudh Rent Act requires amendment.'<sup>2</sup> The Liberals, moderate nationalists who were moving away from the

<sup>1</sup>Harcourt Butler Colln., Mss. Eur. F. 116 (India Office Library, London), vol. 80: Note of Butler's interview with taluqdars, 6 March 1921.

<sup>2</sup>Uttar Pradesh State Archives, Lucknow (hereafter UPSA), U.P. General Administration Dept. (hereafter GAD), File 50/1921, Kw: Commissioner, Lucknow Division to Chief Sec., U.P., 14 Jan. 1921.

Congress as it adopted a more militant posture at this time, shared something of both the Congress and the Government positions. With local Congressmen, some of them had supported the initial organizational efforts and demands of the tenants. After January 1921, they were foremost in pressing for legislation to improve their conditions.

The underlying causes of the peasant protest that brought forth these reactions lay in a pattern of agrarian relations that had evolved over a long period. In 1856 Awadh was brought under direct British rule in order, it was said, to rescue the province from the effects of misrule and anarchy. The mutiny and civil rebellion of 1857-9, which brought some of the fiercest fighting and severest reprisals of the century, formed, from that point of view, an unfortunate interlude. After that the benefits of Pax Britannica flowed freely, towards some. Chief among the beneficiaries were the two hundred and eighty or so taluqdars who, for their part in the recent uprising, were now held up as the 'natural leaders' of the people. The taluqdars were mostly local rajas and heads of clans, officials and tax-farmers who had secured an independent position in the land before the British annexation, plus a handful of 'deserving chiefs' who were given estates confiscated from the most notorious of the rebels. On this motley crowd the new rulers formally conferred many of the rights of the landowning gentry of Britain. Three-fifths of the cultivated area of Awadh was settled with them in return for the regular payment of revenue and assistance in maintaining order in the countryside. And British policy was now directed towards ensuring the taluqdars the wealth, status and security necessary to fulfil this role. The extent of the British commitment to the taluqdars was indicated by Harcourt Butler when he wrote, in the 1890s, that for political purposes 'the Taluqdars are Oudh'.<sup>3</sup> By the Encumbered Estates Act of 1870 and subsequent measures, the colonial administrators even agreed to bale out any insolvent taluqdari estate by taking over its management for as long as twenty years—although this ran counter to all their principles of political economy.

Some effort was made to secure the intermediary rights of other traditionally privileged groups: village proprietors, coparcenary

<sup>3</sup>T.R. Metcalf, *Land, Landlords and the British Raj Northern India in the Nineteenth Century* (Delhi, 1979), p. 198; see also Metcalf in R.E. Frykenberg, (ed.), *Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History* (Madison, 1969), p. 147.

communities controlling various plots of land and privileged tenants of several categories. This was necessitated in part by the prolonged resistance of many of these inferior right holders, such as the Barwar Rajputs of Amsin Pargana and the under-proprietors on the Raja of Pirpur's estate (both in Faizabad district).<sup>4</sup> Legally and in terms of actual power, these intermediary groups retained something of their earlier position in the taluqdari as well as the non-taluqdari areas of Awadh.<sup>5</sup> Yet Pax Britannica and the compromise sub-settlements of the 1860s tended to work against the interests of the lower classes.

Generally it was laid down that under-proprietors would pay the Government revenue plus a further 10 to 50 per cent. Thus they bore the entire burden of any enhancement of revenue while the taluqdars escaped any new obligations. In the years after the first round of settlements and sub-settlements had been completed, the smaller under-proprietors lost more and more of their remaining rights to the taluqdars and, to some extent, to money-lenders and other men from outside. Many groups of once privileged tenants also suffered losses in the general process of enhancement of rents. The Government contributed fully to these developments. On the Government-managed estates of Mehdona, Kapradih and Sehipur in Faizabad district, for instance, several arrests were made for the non-payment of rents in full by underproprietors; and

where tenants held reduced rates only by favour of the taluqdar, without any legal claim based on a former proprietary title, the Government exerted itself vigorously to bring rents up to the level of those paid by ordinary cultivators.<sup>6</sup>

Among the tenants, then, Brahmans and Thakurs suffered a progressive decline in terms of favoured rental rates as well as the areas of land leased out to them. Yet the pressure on them was light by comparison with that on the Kurmis and Muraos, cultivating castes with a reputation for efficiency who formed a considerable part of the tenantry, numbering in all about a million in Awadh in the 1880s. In Rae Bareli, in the decade following the first regular settlement of the district, during which prices rose only gradually,

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 131-3.

<sup>5</sup>P.J. Musgrave, 'Landlords and Lords of the Land: Estate Management and Social Control in U.P., 1860-1920', *Modern Asian Studies*, 6:3 (July 1972).

<sup>6</sup>Metcalf in Frykenberg (ed.), *Land Control*, pp. 133-4; see also *Collection of Papers Relating to the Condition of the Tenantry and the Working of the Present Rent Law in Oudh*, 2 vols. (Allahabad, 1883).



the increase in their rents varied between what was described as 'nominal' and 30-80 per cent, and actually reached a 100 per cent in one or two cases.<sup>7</sup>

With the taluqdari settlement, the bulk of the population of Awadh (just under 11½ million in 1881, rising to over 12 million by 1921) had in any case lost all their rights, which were unrecorded earlier and now excluded from the record. The vast majority of cultivators emerged as tenants-at-will on small holdings, or as landless labourers. In Lucknow district at the beginning of the 1880s, only a half per cent of the agricultural population held more than 50 *bighas* of land (a *bigha* = 5/8 acre). Six per cent held from 20 to 50 *bighas*, 11½ per cent 10 to 20 *bighas*, 15 per cent 5 to 10 *bighas*, and 39½ per cent less than 5 *bighas*. This was at a time when officials, who could scarcely be accused of liberality in these matters, felt that a cultivator needed at least 5 *bighas* to live 'reasonably'. The remaining 27½ per cent of Lucknow's agricultural population were classified as landless day-labourers.<sup>8</sup>

The resistance of Kurmi and other tenants on various occasions<sup>9</sup> could do no more than slow down these developments in particular areas. Nor did legislation that aimed at providing a modicum of security for the unprotected tenants and some control on the level of rent enhancements, significantly arrest the general deterioration. The landlords had too many cards up their sleeves, most of them the gift of the British Raj itself, to be seriously affected by such paper threats. They collected more than the recorded rents, instituted a system of unofficial taxation whereby the tenant paid a large premium or *nazrana* to be admitted or re-admitted to a holding, and often ignored the law altogether.<sup>10</sup> C.W. McMinn noted in the 1870s that taluqdar power was still great, in some ways indeed 'more absolute' than before, but now (constricted to narrower channels) it had 'meaner developments'.<sup>11</sup> The taluqdars now concentrated their efforts on screwing up their incomes from their estates, without any concern for protecting old tenants and dependants or improving their lands. The peasants of Pratapgarh

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., vol. I, p. 135.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., vol. II, p. 400.

<sup>9</sup>F.W. Porter, *Final Settlement Report of the Allahabad District* (Allahabad, 1878), pp. 47-8; S. Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography*, vol. I (London, 1975), p. 46.

<sup>10</sup>See G. Pandey, *The Ascendancy of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh, 1926-34; A Study in Imperfect Mobilization* (Delhi, 1978), p. 21.

<sup>11</sup>Quoted in Metcalf, *Land, Landlords and the Raj*, p. 175.

described this situation in their own idiom in conversation with the Deputy Commissioner of the district in 1920. Referring to the *murda faroshi kanun* (literally, the 'law for sale of the corpse'), i.e. the law permitting immediate enhancement of rent on, or sale of, the land of a dead tenant, they said that a new kind of Mahabrahman (the lowest among the Brahmans on account of the fact that he lives on funeral gifts) had come into being. The one object of this creature was to pray for an epidemic—just as the grain dealer prays for a famine—so that he might reap a rich harvest of *murda faroshi* fees. This Mahabrahman was the landlord. 'Before the ashes are cold on the pyre this Mahabrahman has to be satisfied.'<sup>12</sup>

To add to the misfortunes of the lower classes, population pressure on the land and the cost of living steadily increased from the later nineteenth century. In these conditions a very large section of the Awadh peasantry, both smaller landowners and tenants, sank into debt. As time went on they relied more and more heavily on their valuable crops, especially rice and wheat, to pay off interest and other dues, and the acreage under these crops increased. For their own consumption the bulk of the rural population depended on the inferior grains—maize, barley, *jowar* and *bajra*. One result of the growing demand for these inferior grains and the decline in the area over which they were cultivated, was that their prices rose even more sharply than the prices of wheat and rice in the first decades of the twentieth century.<sup>13</sup> It was a somewhat paradoxical index of the social dislocation that lay behind the revolt of the Awadh peasantry after the First World War.

January 1921 was the culminating point of a movement that had advanced very rapidly indeed from its inception towards the end of 1919. Kisan Sabhas, or peasants' associations, were being organized locally in Pratapgarh from the early months of 1920. By the middle of that year they had found a remarkable leader and coordinator in Baba Ramchandra, a Maharashtrian of uncertain antecedents who had been an indentured labourer in Fiji and then a *sadhu* (religious mendicant) propagating the Hindu scriptures in Jaunpur, Sultanpur and Pratapgarh, before he turned to the task of

<sup>12</sup>U.P.S.A., U.P. Rev. (A) Dept. File 753 of 1920; 'Report on Agrarian Disturbances in Pratapgarh', by V.N. Mehta, Deputy Commnr., Pratapgarh (hereafter, Mehta's Report), p. 4.

<sup>13</sup>M.H. Siddiqi, *Agrarian Unrest in North India: The United Provinces, 1918-22* (New Delhi, 1978), ch. II.

organizing Kisan Sabhas. Led by Ramchandra, members of the Pratapgarh Kisan Sabha sought the support of urban nationalists. It was then that Jawaharlal Nehru 'discovered' the Indian peasantry and found the countryside 'afire with enthusiasm and full of a strange excitement';<sup>14</sup> and then that the Kisan Sabha workers of the Congress who had endeavoured to extend their links in the villages of UP since 1918, began to work in association with the organizers of these independent local Sabhas, especially in Awadh.

Before the involvement of the nationalists from the cities, the Awadh Kisan Sabha movement had already gained considerable strength. There were reported to be 585 panchayats (village arbitration boards established by the peasants) working in Pratapgarh district alone. In the month or two during which Rure, the village in Pratapgarh where the first Kisan Sabha was established, was a centre of the movement, 100,000 peasants were said to have registered themselves with the association. These early efforts at organization had received indirect encouragement from the sympathetic attitude of the Pratapgarh Deputy Commissioner, V.N. Mehta, who asked Ramchandra and other peasant leaders to forward the peasants' complaints to him for examination and instituted inquiries regarding some of the more tangible allegations.<sup>15</sup> Now, with the growth of urban nationalist support, the movement advanced more swiftly still until it had engulfed large parts of Pratapgarh, Rae Bareli, Sultanpur and Faizabad districts, and established important footholds elsewhere. Its strength may be judged from the numbers of peasants who were said to have turned out for very different kinds of demonstrations: 40-50,000 to press for the release of Ramchandra from Pratapgarh jail in September 1920, 80-100,000 for the first Awadh Kisan Congress held in Ayodhya (Faizabad district) in December 1920.<sup>16</sup> Such estimates of the numbers involved in mass gatherings are of course notoriously unreliable. But even if we scale them down to one half or a third, as colonial officials did at the time, they indicate the rise of a movement of massive proportions.

<sup>14</sup>J. Nehru, *An Autobiography* (London, 1936, 1947 rpt), pp. 57, 51.

<sup>15</sup>Baba Ramchandra Colln. II (Nehru Memorial Museum & 'Library, New Delhi'; hereafter NMML), Acc. No. 610: RC XI, 'Autobiographical Notebook', p. 13; Ramchandra Colln. I (NMML) Acc. No. 163: 'Note' of 8 Aug. 194[?] and incomplete letter of 1939, pp. 5-6. For Mehta's role, see also Mehta's Report, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup>Siddiqi, *op. cit.*, pp. 146-7.

Matters came to a head in January 1921, and soon after, the Awadh peasant movement, by now bereft of support from its erstwhile urban allies, was repressed by a determined attack on the part of the Government. It was not crushed, however, and a few months later it arose again in northern Awadh in the modified form of an Eka (unity) movement. We write of this as a continuation of the earlier, Kisan Sabha, phase of the struggle because the same kinds of forces were involved in its creation, and there was the same kind of ambiguous relationship between the Congress and the peasant rebels.<sup>17</sup> The Eka associations were aided in their initial stages by some Congressmen and Khilafatists of Malihabad, Lucknow district. But they quickly outstripped their beginnings, spread out widely and became very militant. The movement was strongest in certain districts of northern Awadh where the evils of grain rents and disguised rents abounded. The peasant associations now raised the cry for commutation to cash rents and resistance to demands for anything more than the recorded rent. They called at the same time for non-cooperation with the colonial regime. Before long, colonialist observers were complaining about the fact that the Indian Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code had 'no provision for a whole countryside arrayed against law and order'.<sup>18</sup> Yet the Congress leadership spared little time for the protagonists of Eka, and in due course this new phase of the movement was suppressed by a large force of armed police and military men.

There could have been no other outcome, given the positions adopted by the various contending forces in UP in early 1921. In the following pages we examine these positions at some length, for what they tell us about different assessments of the nature of political struggle in colonial India and the role of the peasantry in that struggle. The urban nationalist leaders and British officials have left behind more or less detailed discourses on the Awadh peasant movement of these years, alternative perspectives which reveal, we believe, their basic concerns and the extent of their

<sup>17</sup>As the officer specially deputed by the U.P. Govt. to inquire into the Eka movement, Lt Col J.C. Faunthorpe, put it, 'The Eka movement, which commenced towards the end of 1921, is a revival of the Kisan Sabha movement.' *United Provinces Gazette*, 13 May 1922, pt VIII (hereafter Faunthorpe's Report), p. 273.

<sup>18</sup>Clipping from *Englishman* (Calcutta), 28 Feb. 1922 in GOI, Home Dept., Pol. Branch, File 862 of 1922 (NAI, New Delhi).

understanding of the contradictions and possibilities existing in the situation. There are of course subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, variations between the language, say, of Gandhi and of Nehru, or the comments of the Liberals and those of the young non-cooperating Congressmen of 1920-22. Again there is a world of difference, on the Government side, between the response of someone like the Pratapgarh Deputy Commissioner, V. N. Mehta, and that of H. R. C. Hailey, his Commissioner and immediate boss in Faizabad Division, or Harcourt Butler, Lieutenant Governor and then (after 1920) Governor of UP: the first undertook an intensive tour of his district, interviewed 1700 witnesses and collected a mass of material on the basis of which he drew up a 111 page 'Report on Agrarian Disturbances in Pratapgarh' in 1920; the second described the report as 'partisan', 'one-sided', painting peasant grievances in 'lurid' colours; the third dismissed it simply as 'long and crude'.<sup>19</sup>

An appreciation of these variations is important for a proper reconstruction of the history of the period. Yet, in general terms, an official and a Congress stand on the Awadh peasant movement in these years, can be discerned. So can a general landlord position, though the landlords of Awadh were so much the puppets of their colonial masters by this time that they have left no significant deposition of their own. As for the peasants who set off this debate, no one took the trouble of recording their discourse. A small collection of papers, notes and diaries written by Baba Ramchandra mainly in the late 1930s and 1940s has been discovered, and this is in some ways very valuable. But we have no peasant testament outlining the impulses that moved them or defending the actions they took in 1919-22, not even an elaborate statement from Ramchandra. The peasants' view of the struggle will probably never be recovered; and whatever we say about it at this stage must be very tentative. Yet it seems important to try and piece together some part of it, from the isolated statements of peasants found in the documents and from the only other evidence we have—the message contained in their actions. Without this the historical record remains woefully incomplete. And the exercise is relevant for another reason too.

Historians of India have long debated the question of how mass

<sup>19</sup>U.P. Rev. (A) Dept File 753 of 1920. Hailey to Keane, 26 Nov. 1920 and Butler's 'Note' of 17 Dec. 1920.

mobilization occurred in the course of the struggle for liberation from colonial rule. In the earlier writings, nationalist as well as colonialist commentators tended to treat the 'masses' (in this agrarian society, predominantly peasants) as essentially inert. When peasant insurrection occurred and swelled the tide of anti-imperialist agitation in the latter part of British rule in India, it was for the colonialists a sign of manipulation by 'outside agitators', for the nationalists evidence of mobilization by popular urban leaders. Colonialist (and neo-colonialist) historiography has not moved very far from this early position, although the theory of deliberate instigation of disturbance among ignorant and unconcerned people has been rendered somewhat superfluous by the discovery of 'factions', their members ever ready, in their hundreds if not thousands or indeed tens of thousands, to rise behind 'faction-leaders' in the latter's quest for the prestige and profits of office.<sup>20</sup> Liberal nationalist and Marxist historians, on the other hand, have gone on to make significant new statements regarding the politics of mass protest in India.

First, research indicated that many of the most important peasant insurrections in the country were largely autonomous, and that the intervention of 'outside' leaders was a marginal and, often, a late phenomenon. But while it was recognized that peasants had at times exercised an independence of initiative, their actions were seen as having been non-political or at best 'pre-political'. More recently some scholars have granted that these actions were in fact (at times) political, in the sense that they threw up a challenge to the established structure of authority and sought to create alternative centres of power. Yet the previous view persists: indeed, it remains dominant in the universities and among others interested in the recent history of the subcontinent, finding expression for instance, in the common equation of the Congress movement with the 'political' movement and of workers' and peasants' struggles with a 'social' one. And where some acknowledgement has been made of the political content of the latter, a new argument seems to have arisen. It is now suggested, in what might be called the last stand of traditional nationalist historiography, that these sectional struggles, of peasants and workers and other labouring and exploited classes, were out of step with the primary need of the 'nation' at that stage in its

<sup>20</sup>See D. Hardiman, 'The Indian 'Faction': A Political Theory Examined', in this volume.

history—the need to advance the anti-imperialist movement.<sup>21</sup>

The validity of some of these propositions cannot be fully tested until a good deal more research has been undertaken into modern Indian history, especially in the domain of mass movements and popular consciousness. Yet enough is known already about particular struggles, like that of the peasants in Awadh from 1919-22, to raise doubts about certain long-standing assumptions regarding what has come to be described as the relationship between popular struggles and the Indian national movement. It is the limited purpose of this essay to examine these assumptions in the light of what we know, from secondary as well as primary sources, about the Awadh peasant movement. I shall first analyse the very different contemporary responses to the political events of 1919-22 in Awadh, and then go on to consider whether historians commenting on peasant revolt and Indian nationalism have not too readily accepted the viewpoint of the better-educated and more vocal participants in the anti-colonial struggle in nineteenth-and twentieth-century India. .

### *The Congress Response*

In February 1921, when he visited UP, Gandhi issued the following *Instructions* to the peasants of the province:

Attainment of swaraj or redress of grievances is impossible unless the following rules are strictly observed.

1. We may not hurt anybody. We may not use our sticks against anybody. We may not use abusive language or exercise any other undue pressure.
2. We may not loot shops.
3. We should influence our opponents by kindness, not by using physical force nor stopping their water supply nor the services of the barber and the washerman.

<sup>21</sup>See Bipan Chandra, *Nationalism and Colonialism in Modern India* (New Delhi, 1979) for the view that Gandhi and the post-World War I Congress 'aroused [the masses] to political activity', and for the above distinction between 'political' and 'social' struggle, pp. 127, 165, 183 and *passim*. There is a faint echo of this 'political'-'social' distinction also in Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903-1908* (New Delhi, 1973), p. 515; and it is commonly voiced at academic seminars in India and elsewhere. The view that a peasant struggle was ill-timed, or diversionary, is expressed most clearly in Siddiqi, *op. cit.*, pp. 217, 219. It is also reflected in Bipan Chandra, *op. cit.*, p. 347.

4. We may not withhold taxes from Government or rent from the landlord.
5. Should there be any grievances against zemindars they should be reported to Pandit Motilal Nehru and his advice followed.
6. It should be borne in mind that we want to turn zemindars into friends.
7. We are not at the present moment offering civil disobedience; we should, therefore, carry out all Government orders.
8. We may not stop railway trains nor forcibly enter them without tickets.
9. In the event of any of our leaders being arrested, we may not prevent his arrest nor create any disturbance. We shall not lose our cause by the Government arresting our leaders; we shall certainly lose it if we become mad and do violence.
10. We must abolish intoxicating drinks, drugs and other evil habits.
11. We must treat all women as mothers and sisters and respect and protect them.
12. We must promote unity between Hindus and Muslims.
13. As amongst Hindus we may not regard anyone as inferior or untouchable. There should be the spirit of equality and brotherhood among all. We should regard all the inhabitants of India as brothers and sisters.
14. We may not indulge in gambling.
15. We may not steal.
16. We may not tell an untruth on any account whatsoever. We should be truthful in all our dealings.
17. We should introduce the spinning-wheel in every home and all—male and female—should devote their spare time to spinning. Boys and girls should also be taught and encouraged to spin for four hours daily.
18. We should avoid the use of all foreign cloth and wear cloth woven by the weavers from yarn spun by ourselves.
19. We should not resort to law courts but should have all disputes settled by private arbitration.

The most important thing to remember is to curb anger, never to do violence and even to suffer violence done to us.<sup>22</sup>

These *Instructions*, directed especially towards the peasants of Awadh who had so recently been responsible for acts of violence, may be taken as the final Congress comment on the peasant movement in Awadh. They were issued, we may be sure, after

<sup>22</sup>*Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. XIX (Ahmedabad, 1966), pp. 419-20



much soul-searching on the part of Gandhi, and a long period of trial-and-error on the part of the Congress leadership as a whole. In the ranks of the Congress and other organized nationalist parties, there were still some who favoured a continuation of the peasants' struggle. But in the thinking of the most important Congress leaders in the province and the country, January-February 1921 marked an important turning-point.

Numbers 1-3, 9 and perhaps 8, in addition to the concluding sentence of Gandhi's *Instructions*, reiterate the deep Gandhian concern for the maintenance of non-violence in all circumstances. It is notable, however, that the specific injunctions contained in them flow not simply from an abhorrence of physical violence in any form, but also from a precise knowledge of the actions taken by the Awadh peasants in the course of the development of the Kisan Sabha movement over the preceding months.

*Instructions 1 and 2* were clearly intended to counter the kind of peasant activism that had broken out in Rae Bareli at the beginning of January 1921 and in Faizabad, Sultanpur and elsewhere a few days later. Peasants had attacked and looted bazars as well as stores of grain in the villages. They had destroyed and burnt property: straw belonging to the landlords, crops on the landlords' fields, large quantities of clothes, jewels and so on. *Instruction 2* related to this. So probably did *Instruction 15*, for destruction is no different from theft in the eyes of the propertied and their counsel.

*Instruction 9* inveighed against the repeated attempts of peasants to liberate their leaders when they were arrested. Such attempts had led on more than one occasion in recent weeks to serious clashes with the police and to police firing. The most famous of these was the incident at Munshiganj bazar, a couple of miles from the centre of Rae Bareli town, on 7 January 1921. On that date thousands of peasants converged on the town from the early hours of the morning. The common object of those who turned out was to obtain the release of a popular leader. Most came because of rumours that Baba Ramchandra had been arrested and imprisoned in Rae Bareli jail. Some reported having heard that Gandhi had been detained there as well. The crowds probably also included some followers of Baba Janki Das, a local Kisan Sabha leader, who had been arrested in the district two days earlier and brought to the town but not, it was reported, before he could instruct his men to get people from Arkha (an early base of the

Kisan Sabha movement) to come and free him.<sup>23</sup> The numbers had soon swelled to an estimated 10,000, and the 'largest and most determined' section of the crowd was said to be at Munshiganj. The assembly was peaceful but refused to break up until their leaders had been released or rather, as it turned out, until a landlord and the police had fired several rounds at them, killing a number and wounding many more.

Just over three weeks later, on 29 January 1921, another man who called himself Ramchandra was arrested near Goshainganj railway station in Faizabad district. He had for some time before this been active in the area, urging peasants to refuse to pay their rents in protest against existing conditions, and advocating the justice of land being owned by its tiller. He had developed a large following—on account, it was said, of his radical preaching, *sadhu's* garb and, not least, his adopted name. When he was arrested crowds gathered at the station following a false report that the authorities intended to take him away by train. They lay on the rails and prevented the train from moving, and were dispersed once again only after police firing and the arrest of eighteen of their number.<sup>24</sup> By this time, indeed, such confrontations between the police and the people had become fairly common. 'Even when minor agitators are tried for petty offences', the Deputy Commissioner of Bara Banki wrote in an affidavit submitted to the Court of the Judicial Commissioner of Awadh in the case instituted against Baba Ramchandra in February 1921, 'enormous gatherings assemble at the court house with the object of intimidating witnesses or to rescue the accused.'<sup>25</sup>

Gandhi no doubt wished to prevent the recurrence of the violent incidents that developed out of these situations. But in the process he attacked the very action that had first demonstrated the organized strength of the peasantry to the British administration and, more importantly, to the peasants themselves. Towards the end of August 1920, the Pratapgarh district authorities had arrested Baba Ramchandra on what appears to have been a fabricated charge of 'theft'. Arrested with him were Thakur Jhinguri Singh, who was

<sup>23</sup>U.P. G.A.D. 50/1921, Kws: J.A. St. John Farnon to Dy. Commnr., Rai Bareli, 19 Jan. 1921, and A.G. Shireff's 'Note' of 29 Jan. 1921.

<sup>24</sup>Siddiqi, *op. cit.*, pp. 168-9.

<sup>25</sup>Morilal Nehru Papers, Group C (Legal) (NMML), File No. 44, 'King-Emperor v. Ram Chandra. Charge Under Sec. 124A IPC, Court of the Judicial Commnr. of Oudh', affidavit submitted by C.W. Grant, Dy. Commnr., Bara Banki, 10 Feb. 1921.

one of the men responsible for the establishment of Kisan Sabhas in the district even before Ramchandra took a hand, and about thirty other peasants. Their plea for bail was refused. Three days later, when the arrested men were due to appear in court in Pratapgarh, 4-5,000 peasants marched to the town to see them—whereupon the hearing was either postponed or held secretly in jail. Upon this the crowd marched to the jail and held a peaceful demonstration outside: it dispersed only after officials had made a number of promises, the nature of which is not clear. Ten days later, a larger crowd (estimated variously at 10,000 to 40-50,000) congregated at Pratapgarh, drawn there by the rumour that Gandhi had come to get Ramchandra released. Gandhi was absent, but the peasants refused to budge until they had extracted a promise from the officials to release Ramchandra the next morning, then spent the night on the banks of the river Sai and re-assembled outside the jail at dawn. As the crowd began to swell even more, the authorities lost their nerve; Ramchandra was released, spirited out of the jail under cover to prevent a stampede, and taken to a spot some distance away where from a tree-top he gave an audience to his followers. In their fear, officials had also assured the crowd that the grievances of the peasants would be investigated; and, if nothing came of this immediately, a few days later the case against Ramchandra, Jhinguri Singh and their co-accused was withdrawn.<sup>26</sup> It was a noble victory, but not one that Gandhi's injunctions would allow the Awadh peasants to repeat.

The origins of *Instruction 8* are equally hard to locate in the principle of non-violence alone. On the occasion of two mass rallies of the peasants, the Awadh Kisan Congress at Ayodhya on 20-21 December 1920 and a later conference at Unchahar in Rae Bareli on 15 January 1921, thousands of peasants practised 'non-cooperation' by travelling ticketless on the trains, and, when evicted, offered 'passive resistance' by lying on the rails until officials gave in and permitted them to travel free of charge. In January 1921, too, as we have noticed above, the peasants practised satyagraha by lying on the rails at Goshainganj (Faizabad) on the day of the arrest of the pretended Ramchandra. Years later,

<sup>26</sup>Siddiqi, *op. cit.*, pp. 130-3. Ramchandra reports that the case against him and his comrades was got up by the Ramganj Estate. See his incomplete, undated letter in Ramchandra Colln., Acc. No. 163, Subject File No. 1—'Papers Relating to the Peasant Movement in Awadh, 1921'.

Jawaharlal Nehru recalled with pride these spontaneous acts of the Awadh peasants. The Non-co-operation Movement had begun, he wrote, and

the *kisans* took to travelling in railway trains in large numbers without tickets, especially when they had to attend their periodical big mass meetings which sometimes consisted of sixty or seventy thousand persons. It was difficult to move them, and, unheard of thing, they openly defied the railway authorities, telling them that the old days were gone. At whose instigation they took to the free mass travelling I do not know. We had not suggested it to them. We suddenly heard that they were doing it.<sup>27</sup>

In February 1921, however, Gandhi advised, nay instructed, the *kisans* to refrain from such actions; and Nehru went along with him.

Numbers 8 and 9 of Gandhi's *Instructions* indicate that, in Gandhi's view as in that of the colonial regime, the peasants bore the responsibility for the preservation of non-violence—and for its break-down in any situation of clash with the authorities. *Instruction 3* shows that this was his view also of any confrontation between the peasant and the landlord. The instruction referred to physical force, but what was unique in it was the injunction against social boycott. It was precisely through this traditional practice that the Kisan Sabhas of Awadh had first signalled their arrival in the post-war political arena and through it too that they had considerably extended their influence. Towards the end of 1919, certain taluqdars of Pratapgarh who were guilty of severe exactions or other oppressive acts, found themselves up against such 'strikes' by the villagers. *Nau dhobi band kar diye gae*, i.e. the services of the barber, the washerman and other performers of menial but essential tasks, were withheld. More than a year later, in December 1920 and January 1921, this form of protest was still widespread in Pratapgarh and Sultanpur districts.<sup>28</sup> Now, after the outbreak of violence at various places; Gandhi sought to restore 'peace' by asking for the voluntary surrender of this time-honoured and effective weapon. No corresponding sacrifice was demanded of the landlords.

Indeed, the concern for the interests of the landlords went further. 'We may not withhold taxes from the Government or rent

<sup>27</sup>Nehru, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

<sup>28</sup>*Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. XX, p. 544; Siddiqi, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

from the landlord' (*Instruction 4*). This was in line with *Instruction 7*: 'We are not at the present moment offering civil disobedience [this 'further step' was adopted by the Congress only in November 1921]; we should, therefore, carry out all Government orders.' But it was actuated by an altogether different argument as well: 'It should be borne in mind that we want to turn zemindars into friends' (*Instruction 6*). 'We should influence our opponents by kindness' (*Instruction 3*). 'Should there be any grievances against zemindars they should be reported to Pandit Motilal Nehru and his advice followed' (*Instruction 5*).

The use of the first person plural pronoun in Gandhi's *Instructions* was a delicate touch, typical of the man. But the delicacy of *Instruction 5*—'Should there be any grievances'—is of a different order. The long-suffering peasant masses of Awadh exploded in anger in 1920-21 in a situation of severe hardship. We have referred above to the well-nigh unchallengeable position guaranteed to the taluqdars by the British administration and—what was perhaps seen as part of that guarantee—the extremely insecure legal position given to the vast majority of tenants in Awadh. We have pointed also to the more or less general trend of immiserization of the peasantry under the weight of a stagnant economy coupled with population growth, rising prices and increasing demands for rent, interest and other dues. The First World War and its immediate aftermath brought new and crushing burdens: rocketing prices, uncertain harvests, War Loans, recruitment and sudden demobilization, and finally a quite disastrous season of epidemic disease. Added to these was renewed pressure from the landlords for enhanced rents, and much increased *nazrana* and other cesses, backed by the force of legal and illegal evictions of *bedakhli*. It was against *bedakhli* and *nazrana* that the peasants of Awadh protested most bitterly in 1920-21. And officials admitted the legitimacy of their protest, and therefore hastily moved to amend the Rent Act. 'There is no doubt', wrote the Commissioner of Lucknow Division having awakened to a new awareness of his surroundings in January 1921,

that in the worst managed taluqdars' estates in this district [Rae Bareli] and others the tenants have been treated with such want of consideration and in some cases with such oppression by the landlords that one is compelled to sympathise with them.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup>U.P., G.A.D. 50/1921, Kws: Commr., Lucknow to Chief Sec., U.P., 14 Jan. 1921.

It was not as if Gandhi knew less than this official about the extent of distress among the peasants. Among the more prominent leaders of the national movement, it was he who first vowed to identify himself with the poorest in the land (in language, in dress, in the food he ate) and to work for their uplift, precisely because of his awareness of their misery. But in Awadh at the beginning of the 1920s, he sought to play down the significance of the clash of interests between landlord and peasant, for tactical reasons as much, it appears, as out of any concern for non-violence. 'Should there be any grievances': in other words, if there were any examples of oppressive acts or punishment or cruelty which a peasant could not possibly tolerate any longer, he should—not protest, organize a social boycott of the oppressor, or perform satyagraha by sitting and fasting outside his house, but—refer the matter to Pandit Motilal Nehru, and follow his advice. Otherwise, outside the sphere of these extreme, absolutely intolerable grievances, 'You should bear a little if the zemindar torments you. We do not want to fight with the zemindars. Zemindars are also slaves and we do not want to trouble them.'<sup>30</sup>

Presiding at the Rae Bareilly District Political Conference a few months later, Jawaharlal Nehru seconded Gandhi. The meeting appealed to tenants and zamindars to live in harmony, and 'although the recent Rent Act [the Awadh Rent Amendment Act which had in the meantime been rushed through the provincial legislature] had made their position worse, still they should patiently bear all their troubles, pay their rents and keep the welfare of the country in view'. Before then, the Congress message had gone out in still plainer terms: peasants in Faizabad Division were asked to give up organizing 'meetings', as well as 'disturbances', and to leave it to Gandhi to win Swaraj.<sup>31</sup>

It needs to be emphasized that Gandhi and other Congress leaders were concerned here not primarily with urging the peasants to forswear violence and continue their struggle by non-violent means. They were urging that the struggle be abandoned altogether—in the interests of 'unity' in what they and later commentators have called the 'greater' struggle against the British.

<sup>30</sup>Gandhi to a peasant audience in Faizabad on 10 Feb. 1921, quoted in Siddiqi, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

<sup>31</sup>Gopal, *op. cit.*, pp. 61, 65. See also Siddiqi, *op. cit.*, p. 179 for Jawaharlal's earlier expression of disapproval at the peasants' actions.

This idea of a united front with the landlords of Awadh in the anti-imperialist campaign bears pondering for a moment, for the landlords' dependence on the British (the 'slavery' that Gandhi spoke of) is obvious enough. Very few of the taluqdars performed any useful function in the rural economy, the man who was Settlement Commissioner of Rae Bareilly in the 1890s recalled later: most of them were 'mere rent collectors'.<sup>32</sup> The British relied on these rent collectors. They were 'a very solid body', 'by no means a negligible quantity' and 'the only friends we have', the Lieutenant Governor of UP observed in 1920. Or again, as he noted in a memorandum justifying a demand for five reserved seats for the taluqdars in the new legislative council to be set up in the province under the reforms of 1919, 'they live on their estates. They are prominent in all good works. They take the lead in all movements for the improvement of the province and make generous subscriptions.'<sup>33</sup>

The mutuality of interests found here is noteworthy, for the taluqdars relied even more heavily on the British. Wherever the Kisan Sabha spread in 1920-21 their authority crumbled at a stroke: very few did 'anything else than shut themselves up in their houses or leave for the nearest town and complain of the supineness of the authorities'.<sup>34</sup> Then, like the village dog who sneaks out barking when danger has passed, the taluqdars returned to battle in February-March 1921, adamant in their refusal to agree to a liberal amendment of the Awadh Rent Act and insistent on the sanctity of the *sanads* (or patents) granted to them by the British after 1857. They were good landlords, one taluqdar asserted in a discussion regarding the proposed legislative amendments; therefore, 'the tenant . . . should only be the tiller of the soil, and he should not be given any rights'.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>32</sup>Butler Colln., vol. 75: S.H. Fremantle's comment on R. Burns's talk on 'Recent Rent & Revenue Policy in the United Provinces' in *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* (20 May 1932), p. 674.

<sup>33</sup>Butler Colln., vol. 21: letters to H.E. Richards, 2 June 1920, and Vincent, 10 Nov. 1920; vol. 75: Memo prepared for the Southborough Committee, 1 Dec. 1918. Butler 'screwed' Rs 20 lakhs out of the Maharaja of Balrampur for the War Loan, and got him a knighthood in return. He had in fact intended to extract 50 lakhs, but because of a misunderstanding the subordinate official whom Butler sent to Balrampur asked only for 20 lakhs (Butler Colln., vol. 20: Butler to Hewett, 19 July 1918).

<sup>34</sup>U.P., G.A.D. 50/3/1921: Hailey to Lambert, 1 Feb. 1921; cf. also Butler Colln., vol. 80: Butler's notes on his meeting with taluqdars on 6 March 1921.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid; note on meeting with taluqdars, 12 Feb. 1921. For the emphasis on *sanads*, see esp. Raja Sir Rampal Singh's 'Taluqdars and the Amendment of the Oudh Rent Law' (Lucknow, n.d.), in *ibid*.

Nehru himself admirably summed up the position of the taluqdars in his *Autobiography*:

The taluqdars and big zamindars . . . had been the spoilt children of the British Government, but that Government had succeeded, by the special education and training it provided or failed to provide for them, in reducing them, as a class, to a state of complete intellectual impotence. They did nothing at all for their tenantry, such as landlords in other countries have to some little extent often done, and became complete parasites on the land and people. Their chief activity lay in endeavouring to placate the local officials, without whose favour they could not exist for long, and demanding ceaselessly a protection of their special interests and privileges.<sup>36</sup>

But that was a later reflection. In 1921 Nehru and Gandhi looked aghast at the actions taken by the Awadh peasants against these creatures of imperialism. The symbolic significance of the Munshiganj events of 7 January 1921 when the landlord and the Deputy Commissioner lined up with the armed police against unarmed peasants and their local Congress allies, was missed. Or at least it was overlooked; for even at the time Nehru described the landlord as 'half an official' and wrote bitterly of 'the twins' (the British Deputy Commissioner and the Sikh landlord) who stood shoulder to shoulder at Munshiganj.<sup>37</sup> Yet, the Congress leaders looked to their landlord 'brothers' for support in the great struggle that was then raging against the British.

### *The Colonial View*

A British intelligence official who travelled around a 'disturbed' area in December 1920 and January 1921 made what was in some ways a shrewder analysis of the political situation in the UP countryside, in spite of his need to justify the colonial power—which he did at every step. His assessment was based on a month's tour through the part of Allahabad district that bordered on Pratapgarh (Partabgarh in his report) and Jaunpur. Conditions differed here in significant respects from those that obtained in Awadh. Yet a strong Kisan Sabha movement arose in the same years, and there are so many features of similarity that this report on Allahabad, reproduced in full as an Appendix to this paper, may

<sup>36</sup>Nehru, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

<sup>37</sup>*Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, vol. 1 (New Delhi, 1972), pp. 213, 224.



be taken as representative of the official discourse on the peasant movement in Awadh at this time.

Intended as a general report (and a secret one at that), this Intelligence Department document is far less selective than Gandhi's *Instructions*. Its ostensible purpose was to establish the identity of the opposing forces in the countryside and the reasons for peasant discontent. The report is therefore to the point about the causes of the Kisan Sabha movement.

Everywhere . . . the great outcry is against bedakhli (ejectment), in spite of the large amount of marusi [*maurusi*, i.e. land held on a stable-occupancy tenure] land held by cultivators in these parts. (See p.193 below.)

The situation was far more serious in the neighbouring districts of Awadh where the great bulk of the tenants' land was *ghair-maurusi* (non-occupancy). But even in Allahabad,

the idea prevails that the zamindars are avoiding the pinch of rising prices by taking it out of their tenants, both in the form of nazranas and by raising rents. When enhanced rents are not paid, the tenants are evicted, or in some cases the land is given for ploughing to others, without even the formality of an ejectment decree. (p. 193 below.)

The official's comments on the structure of colonial administration are equally frank. No one in the villages knew anything about the much-vaunted Montagu-Chelmsford reforms and the right of franchise conferred upon some people, he tells us, until Congress spread the word that votes should not be cast. But for the non-cooperators, the elections would have been 'even more of a farce' than they actually turned out to be. It would have meant, he adds in a significant observation, that 'the subordinate officials and well wishers of the government wishful to make the Reform Scheme a success would have brought voters to the polling stations as they did recruits to the colours and subscriptions to the War Loan.' (p. 195 below.) Elsewhere he pinpoints the contemporary social and political position of the landlords, 'The average zamindar is only concerned with collecting his rents and pays very little attention to improving the means of production, communication and irrigation on his estates.' 'The position taken by the zamindars is that they and their forefathers have been well wishers of the government, and it is up to that government now to help them out of their

difficulties'. 'Their only wish is for things to go on the same as ever'. (p. 194 below.)

The major weakness in this report is the absence of any direct reference to the role of the colonial Government. The author plainly fails to make sufficient allowance for the fact that he is 'a European official', his assertion to the contrary notwithstanding. The point he wishes to stress most of all is that the Kisan Sabha agitation is 'not in any way anti-British nor even anti-Government'. The movement, he suggests, is basically directed against the landlords—and who can deny that the latter have in a large measure brought it upon themselves? He argues, further, in an interesting variation of the 'manipulation' theme, that the peasants are really quite ignorant of the larger issues at stake; they did not even know who Gandhi was, and actually said 'We are for Gandhiji and the Sarkar'. (p. 197 below.) We shall have more to say about this in a moment.

First, it may be noted that the intelligence official's clean chit to the Government and the Court of Wards, and his contention that the peasants were in no way anti-Government or anti-British, is contradicted by testimony that he himself inadvertently provides:

The idea is a fixed one [in the minds of the villagers] that a poor man has no chance against a rich man in a contest in the courts, and who will say that there is not some truth in this under the system of civil and criminal justice as it has come to be practised in India. (p. 193 below.)

He admits, besides, that the peasants blame the Government for all their sufferings during the War and believe that they 'supplied the men and money' but got nothing in return. Finally, there is in the latter part of the report still more conclusive evidence against the intelligence man's claim that the Government was 'above it all'. Here it is stated that when it was announced to crowds of peasants that Gandhi had ordered that no votes be given, 'everyone' obeyed. 'For the present . . . Gandhi's word is supreme'. 'What he orders must be done'. (pp. 196-7 below.) That fact stood as an open challenge to the authority of the British. One should add that in a situation where the peasants were not even certain of who Gandhi was (as the intelligence report indicates), it is unlikely that they would always come to know what he had 'ordered'. Rather they must often have decided, by assumption, what his orders were. The point is of some importance for, as we shall see in the next section of this essay, in parts of Awadh Gandhi's name came to be

used by peasant rebels, without any specific instructions from Gandhi, to deal out justice to the landlords and the police—the subordinate officials as well as the well-wishers of the regime.

The intelligence official's remarks regarding the supremacy of Gandhi, however, tell us a good deal more about the nature of the peasant movement in Awadh in 1919-22. They indicate the important role played by rumour in the rise of such movements. It is a common assertion that peasants, scattered and isolated by the conditions of their existence, are incapable of mobilizing themselves for political action. They need an 'outside leader', we are told—a Peasant King or a modern substitute, come to deliver the people from their thrall. Yet a Just, and usually distant Ruler has often been known to provide the necessary inspiration for peasant revolt. The belief in an 'outside leader' can also be seen as the obverse of a belief in the break-down of the locally recognized structure of authority; and rumour fulfils the function of spreading such a notion as efficiently as the leader from the town. Here lies the real significance of the myth of the Great Man: 'someone' has challenged the powers that be, 'someone' has come to deliver. Hence:

The currency which Mr Gandhi's name has acquired even in the remotest villages is astonishing. No one seems to know quite who or what he is, but it is an accepted fact that what he orders must be done. He is a Mahatma or sadhu, a Pandit, a Brahman who lives at Allahabad, even a Deota. One man said he was a merchant who sells cloth at three annas a yard. Someone had probably told him about Gandhi's shop [the new Swadeshi store set up in the city of Allahabad]. The most intelligent say he is a man who is working for the good of the country, but the real power of his name is perhaps to be traced back to the idea that it was he who got *bedakhli* stopped in Partabgarh. It is a curious instance of the power of a name. (p. 196 below.)

A brisk trade in rumours arose in many parts of India during the First World War. Embellished, re-interpreted, modified and magnified as they were passed on from person to person, these rumours contributed significantly to the flood of mass risings in this period. There was a widespread belief that the British Empire was on the verge of collapse; the recruitment campaign grew ever more furious and fearful because its armies were decimated, there was a need to scrounge pennies from the people (the War Loans) because its coffers were empty. The advocacy of Home Rule took on a new

meaning. The German King was sending troops to help the opponents of the Raj, it was said. The world was turning upside down. The day of the downtrodden had come. So stories concerning the coming of the Germans caused 'excitement' not only in the villages of Allahabad (p. 197 below.); they accompanied a whole variety of other mass uprisings in these years—agitation among the Oraons of Ranchi and Chota Nagpur (and in the distant tea-gardens of Assam) in 1915-16, violent revolt among the Santhals of Mayurbhanj (Orissa) in 1917 and the large-scale rioting in Shahabad (Bihar) on the occasion of the Baqr-Id in the latter year, for instance.<sup>38</sup>

The 'power of a name' was evident again in Awadh in the first years of the 1920s. Both 'Baba Ramchandra' and 'Gandhi' came to acquire an extraordinary appeal. This is highlighted by the huge demonstrations for the release of Ramchandra on different occasions, and the success of the 'pretender' Ramchandra at Goshainganj (Faizabad), noticed above. It is testified to also by the 'multiple personality' that Ramchandra appeared to develop during this period: he was reported to be 'in Bahraich on the 5th [January 1921] by Nelson, to be in Barabanki at the same time by Grant and in Fyzabad [Faizabad] by Peters'.<sup>39</sup>

Rumours about the presence of Gandhi added to the tumult on several occasions and, as we have already noted, brought thousands of peasants thronging to Pratapgarh jail in September 1920 and to Rae Bareli on 7 January 1921 when the firing at Munshiganj occurred. Less than a week later, the Commissioner of Faizabad reported that 'large numbers' of peasants were heading towards Rae Bareli (in which district a big meeting of peasant delegates was scheduled to be held, at Unchahar, on 15 January), having been told by their Kisan Sabhas that 'it was Gandhi's order that they are to go'.<sup>40</sup> But with these indications of the response to 'Gandhi' and 'Ramchandra', we have passed into the domain of the peasants' perspective on the political events of 1919-22.

<sup>38</sup>See IOL, London, L/P & J/6/1448 of 1916; L/P & J/6/1488 of 1917; L/P & J/6/1507 of 1918; GOI, Home Progs., Conf., 1919, vol. 52.

<sup>39</sup>U.P., GAD 50/1921, Kws: Hailey to Chief Sec., 15 Jan 1921. Nelson, Grant and Peters were the Dy. Commrs of the three districts named

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., Hailey to Chief Sec., 13 Jan. 1921.

*The Peasants' Perspective*

'We are for Gandhiji and the Sarkar'(p. 197 below). The peasants of UP, like peasant rebels elsewhere,<sup>41</sup> appear to have retained faith in the justice and benevolence of a distant ruler, the 'Sarkar', even as they revolted against his despotic agents. From this point of view, even the statement in the intelligence report on Allahabad district that the reverence for Gandhi was partly due to the belief that he had influence with the Government may be said to have had a grain of truth in it.

It is perhaps significant that in the Awadh of the early 1920s, those who spoke of Gandhi displacing the King at Delhi or in London tended to be men from the towns.<sup>42</sup> The peasants' own 'kings' were recruited locally. 'Gandhi Raj' would bring reduced rents, and

*Baba Ram Chandra Ke rajwa*  
*Parja maja urawe na*  
(In the raj of Baba Ramchandra  
The people will make merry).<sup>43</sup>

The peasants' Gandhi was not a remote, western-educated lawyer-politician: he was a Mahatma, a Pandit, a Brahman, even a merchant 'who lives at Allahabad'. (p. 196 below.) Baba Ramchandra was more emphatically still a local man—a *sadhu* of renown in the districts of Jaunpur, Sultanpur and Pratapgarh, even before he gained a position of importance in the Kisan Sabha movement.

M.H. Siddiqi, citing the folk-rhyme regarding Ramchandra quoted above, rightly observes that the notion of *raja* (king) and *praja* (subjects) was 'so deeply ingrained in the psyche' of the peasant that he spoke even of popular peasant leaders in these terms.<sup>44</sup> The evidence from Awadh is indeed striking in this respect. Shah Muhammad Naim Ata, the descendant of a pious Muslim revered by Hindus and Muslims alike in the village of Salon (Rae Bareli district), became 'King of Salon' when he joined

<sup>41</sup>Cf. Gopal, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-50n; I.J. Catanach, 'Agrarian Disturbances in Nineteenth Century India', *Indian Economic & Social History Review*, 3:1 (1966); Daniel Field, *Rebels in the Name of the Tsar* (Boston, 1976), *passim*

<sup>42</sup>U.P., GAD 50/2/1921, D O. No. 1620 from Office of Publicity Commnr., Naini Tal, 25 June 1921, quoting article in the *Leader* entitled 'Perversion of Peasants'; Siddiqi, *op. cit.*, pp. 173n, & 178n.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 200, & 112n.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 122-3n.

the rebels in 1920. Jhinguri Singh, founder of what was probably the first Kisan Sabha of the movement in Rure (Pratapgarh district), was acclaimed 'Raja of Rure' and said to have 'swallowed all laws'. The pretender Ramchandra established his 'kingdom' in the region of Goshanganj (Faizabad district), held court and meted out justice before his arrest in January 1921. Thakurdin Singh, a servant of the Raja of Parhat, had done the same in some of the latter's villages in Pratapgarh district a couple of months earlier. In February 1922, again, it was reported that the leaders of the Eka movement had begun to assume the title of Raja and were moving about the countryside with 'large bodyguards of archers and spearmen'.<sup>45</sup>

The pithy rhyme from the Patti tahsil of Pratapgarh district thus captures a central feature of the traditional peasant view of the political world. There are rulers and ruled. And rulers are usually just: they must be, for their subjects to remain contented and for the normal functioning of the prescribed order of things. As we shall see, it was a view that at least some sections of the Awadh peasantry were to discard as their struggle matured between 1919 and 1922.

In the early stages of the Kisan Sabha movement, however, traditionalism was pronounced. One of the earliest forms of peasant protest to come to notice in Awadh during this period was the age-old practice of social boycott—*nau dhobi band*. The customary sanction of village caste panchayats was used to enforce the boycott among the peasants.<sup>46</sup> Caste solidarity and the authority of the caste panchayat appears also to have been of significance in the setting up of the Kisan Sabhas. The villages where the first Sabhas were established, such as Rure, Arkha and Rasulpur, had in their populations a large proportion of Kurmis and Muraos, 'superior' cultivating castes with a tradition of solidarity and independence, and it was among these castes that the Kisan Sabhas found their initial base.<sup>47</sup>

In southern and eastern Awadh as a whole the Kurmis were

<sup>45</sup>U P, GAD 50/1921: telegram from Commnr, Lucknow to Chief Sec, U.P., 12 Jan. 1921; Mehta's Report, p. 3; S.K. Mitral and Kapil Kumar, 'Baba Ram Chandra and Peasant Upsurge in Oudh, 1920-21', *Social Scientist*, No. 71 (June 1978); extracts from the *Englishman* and the *Leader* as in notes 18 and 42 above. Cf. Pushkin's *The Captain's Daughter* for a picture of Pugachev, the Pretender.

<sup>46</sup>Siddiqi, *op cit.*, p. 111.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 117; W.F. Crawley, 'Kisan Sabhas & Agrarian Revolt in the United Provinces, 1920-21', *Modern Asian Studies*, 5:2 (1971), p. 101.

thought to be the 'mainstay' of the movement all the way from the last months of 1919 to the early part of 1921.<sup>48</sup> At more than one place in his notes and diaries, Baba Ramchandra reports how Thakur Jhinguri Singh and Thakur Sahdev Singh, the men who were responsible for drawing him into the Kisan Sabha movement, were aided in their earlier efforts to promote the movement by a number of 'honest, dedicated, self-sacrificing' Kurmis named Kashi, Bhagwandin, Prayag and Ayodhya. Jhinguri Singh, Sahdev Singh and their families initially had to bear the entire cost of looking after the thousands of peasants who in the early months of 1920 flocked to Rure to report their grievances. Then Bhagwandin, Kashi, Prayag and Ayodhya got together and proceeded to mobilize support from their caste-fellows. This they did so successfully that several thousand rupees were raised in a short while, and the movement gained a more secure footing.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, on the occasion of the great Awadh Kisan Congress held at Ayodhya in December 1920, the Rasulpur (Rae Bareli district) Kisan Sabha leader, Mata Badal Koeri, raised Rs 6000 from the Koeris who had come to attend the Congress.<sup>50</sup>

By the winter of 1920-21, the Kisan Sabha had gained considerable support among tenants and labourers of a wide range of castes, including Muslims. Caste consciousness may now have posed other problems for the organizers of the movement: hence, perhaps, the need for Ramchandra's directive that after meetings, local Ahirs should look after and feed Ahirs who had come from distant places, and Kurmis, Koeris, Muslims, Brahmans and others should do likewise.<sup>51</sup>

The peasant movement in Awadh was, in addition, marked by a pervasive religious symbolism. At the early peasant meetings Ramchandra and others commonly recited excerpts from Tulsidas's *Ramcharitmanas*,<sup>52</sup> the favourite religious epic of the Hindus in

<sup>48</sup>Ramchandra Colln II, RC XIII; U.P. Rev. (A) Dept File 753 of 1920: Hailey's 'Note' on Mehta's Report, dated 17 Dec 1920; U.P., GAD 50/1921, Kws: Commnr., Faizabad to Chief Sec., U.P., 14 Jan. 1921

<sup>49</sup>Ramchandra Colln I, Subject File No. 1: 'Papers Relating to Peasant Movement in Avadh 1921', incomplete letter of 1939 and 'Avadh, U.P., ke kisanon par mere niji vichar' (14 July 1934). Translation from the Ramchandra papers is mine, except where otherwise stated.

<sup>50</sup>Ramchandra Colln. II, RC XI: 'Autobiographical Notebook', p. 35

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>52</sup>Nehru, op cit., p. 53; D.N. Panigrahi, 'Peasant Leadership', in B.N. Pandey (ed.), *Leadership in South Asia* (New Delhi, 1977), p. 85. Old Congress workers of Sandila in Hardoi district recalled how Madari Pasi also 'recited *kathas* and held peasant meetings'.

northern India and especially beloved of people in this region: their own language, Awadhi, was after all the language of Tulsi-das's composition, and places like Ayodhya (a few miles from Faizabad), the seat of Ram's kingdom, very much part of their world. The phrase 'Sita Ram' early became the chief rallying call of the movement—used by peasants of all communities, Muslims as well as Hindus, to bring out supporters for meetings and (at a later stage) for resistance to Government and landlord agents attempting to overawe members of the Kisan Sabhas, confiscate moveable property or take other action against the peasants.

Baba Ramchandra has a good deal to say about the words 'Sita Ram' in the course of his fairly sketchy writings on the movement. He recalls, in a note written in 1934, that when he first came to Awadh, the greeting *salaam* (usually addressed by one in an inferior station to one in a superior) was widely used. He promoted the use of the alternative, 'Sita Ram', which did away with such discrimination on grounds of status, and thus earned the displeasure of 'many of the praiseworthy [*sic.*] and respectable folk of the upper castes'. Gradually, however, he writes, 'Sita Ram', 'Jai Ram', 'Jai Shankar', caught on in place of *salaam*. And as the movement developed, and his own popularity increased, it was enough for Ramchandra to raise the slogan 'Sita Ram': the cry was promptly taken up in one village after another, and thus in a remarkably short space of time thousands would assemble to see him and hear his discourse.<sup>53</sup>

Elsewhere, Ramchandra writes with still greater pride of the phenomenal power of the peasants' new slogan. On one occasion, early in the history of the Kisan Sabha movement, a confrontation took place at village Bhanti (in Pratapgarh district) between the police and the agents of the Ramganj and Amargarh estates, on the one hand, and Thakur Jhinguri Singh and his co-workers on the other. 'On that side were the wielders of *lathis* and spears', Ramchandra records dramatically. 'On this side was the slogan "Sita Ram" . . . As soon as the cry of "Sita Ram" was raised, thousands of peasants poured out in waves from the surrounding villages.' It needed no more to make the police and other authorities change their tune: with the landlords' men, they left as quietly as possible.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>53</sup>Ramchandra Colln. I, Subject File 1: 'Avadh ke kisan par mere niji vichar' (14 July 1934); Nehru, *op. cit.*, p. 52; interviews with the late Babu Mangla Prasad, one of the Allahabad Congressmen who had been drawn into the Pratapgarh peasant movement in 1920.

<sup>54</sup>Ramchandra Colln II: 'Autobiographical Notebook', p. 26.



In retrospect, indeed, Ramchandra attributes miraculous powers to the phrase 'Sita Ram'. He describes an incident in which a servant of the Amargarh estate forcibly cut a peasant's sugarcane crop for the purpose of feeding the Amargarh estate's elephants. As he returned with his loot loaded on an elephant, he was stopped by a Kisan Sabha worker named Prayag. 'The driver urged the elephant to advance upon him. But Prayag stood his ground, crying "Sita Ram". The elephant refused to advance.' Ramchandra goes on to report that in the part of Awadh where he was first based, the mango trees in the villages for several miles around bore fruit only once every three years. 'Because of the slogan "Sita Ram" they began to bear fruit every year.' He concludes: 'In the most difficult of situations, the peasants turned to the slogan "Sita Ram". And the slogan fulfilled their many different desires. As a result the organization [of the Kisan Sabhas] grew ever stronger.'<sup>55</sup> In other 'notes' written at around the same time, i.e. in 1939 or 1940, Ramchandra rues the fact that the peasants of Awadh were forgetting the two simple words that had brought them such great victories as the extraction, from the British, of the Awadh Rent (Amendment) Act of 1921 and the passing, by a Congress ministry, of the far more thorough U.P. Tenancy Bill of 1939.<sup>56</sup>

These reflections of a man who was by then inclining more and more to a left-wing position point to the religious type of consciousness<sup>57</sup> that the peasants brought to their struggle. That it was not just a 'half-crazy' *sadhu* who attached a special significance to the words 'Sita Ram' is attested to by other contemporary observations. The 'most serious feature' of the situation in January 1921, according to the Deputy Commissioner of Faizabad, was

the immense danger which arises from an organization which at very short notice is able to collect enormous crowds. The existence of a definitely arranged rallying cry is another danger.

The last part of this statement was later elaborated thus:

<sup>55</sup>Ibid, p. 26-7.

<sup>56</sup>Ramchandra Colln. II, RC XIII; Ramchandra Colln. I, Subject File No. 1. 'Note' of 27 Dec. 1939. The 1939 Tenancy Bill received the Governor's approval and became law only in 1940 after the resignation of the Congress ministries.

<sup>57</sup>Ranajit Guha has drawn my attention to this concept which occurs in some of the early writings of Karl Marx.

One of the most powerful weapons at their [the peasants'] command is the war cry—Sita Ram Ki jai. They all say that when this is sounded, most turn out and to a very large extent this is done. It has become the cry of discontent.<sup>58</sup>

The hold of religious symbols on the mind of the peasant is perhaps also indicated by a story relating to the selection of Rure as the place where the first Kisan Sabha should be established. V. N. Mehta, after his enquiries into the movement, suggested that Rure was chosen partly because legend had it that Ram and Lakshman, the heroes of the *Ramayana*, had once rested there. Tulsidas wrote: '*raj samaj virajat Rure*' [the company of Princes honour Rure with their presence], and the people of Rure claimed that this was a reference to none other than their own village.<sup>59</sup> What better traditional sanction than this for the launching from here of a just and righteous political movement?

The idea of a just, or moral, struggle appears to have been fundamental to the peasants' acceptance of the necessity of revolt. Exploitation as such was not unjust. It was inevitable that some ruled and some conducted prayers and some owned the land and some laboured, and all lived off the fruits of that labour. But it was important that everyone in the society made a living out of the resources that were available. It was when the subsistence needs of the peasants of Burma and Indo-China were threatened in the colonial era that the fiercest peasant revolts broke out there.<sup>60</sup> It was similarly when the landlord decided to levy new and oppressive imposts in a period of considerable hardship for substantial sections of the peasantry that resistance was taken up in Awadh as morally right and necessary.

In Allahabad district, the intelligence officer noticed that there was a difference in the peasants' response on the estates of resident proprietors on the one hand and absentee owners on the other, and among the latter especially those of 'new men'—city *baniyas* and *mahajans* and the like.

There is nowhere any genuine objection to performing *hari* and *begari* [forced labour] according to immemorial custom for zamindars who

<sup>58</sup>U P., GAD 50/3/1921. H R C Hailey to Butler, 24 Jan 1921, and 'Note' by Hailey, regarding views of himself, Peters and Scott O'Connor (enclosed with Hailey's letter to Lambert, 1 Feb 1921) See also Nehru, *op cit.*, p 53

<sup>59</sup>Mehta's Report, cited in Siddiqi, *op cit.*, p 115n

<sup>60</sup>James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* (California, 1976), *passim*

are seen and known, but there is a tendency to kick against working for and supplying nazrana, hathyana, motorana [all relatively new 'taxes'] etc. etc. for distant and unknown landowners at the bidding of foul mouthed karindas and sepoy.s.<sup>61</sup> (pp. 192-3 below.)

The feeling against 'new men' may have contributed to the peasant revolt in some of the Awadh districts too. The animosity displayed towards one or two Sikh taluqdars in Rae Bareli, it was suggested in January 1921, was because they were regarded as interlopers. On the estate of Sardar Amar Singh, the peasants were reported to have accepted the leadership of a Rajput occupancy tenant who had been dispossessed following the Mutiny.<sup>62</sup> In an attack on the estate of the small Kurmi taluqdar of Sehgaon-Pacchimgaon, also in Rae Bareli district, the peasants followed the Kurmi descendants of co-sharers likewise dispossessed after the Mutiny.<sup>63</sup> The adoption, as King of Salon, of Shah Naim Ata—descendant in a line of revered benefactors of the village—may also have been the result of a similar kind of sentiment.

There is evidence too of an acceptance of the long-established, 'fair' rights of the landlord—in Awadh as in Allahabad. A contemporary statement on the Awadh Kisan Sabha agitation made the point that the peasants' complaints regarding *begar*, *rasad* and so on were minor compared with their sense of outrage over *bedakhli* and *nazrana*: 'The former had been a custom for generations. The latter were of comparatively recent growth.'<sup>64</sup> In Pratapgarh, Mehta reported on the basis of his inquiries in October 1920, town-based politicians like Mata Badal Pandey had adopted the position that nothing more than the rent should be paid to the landlord; but 'the tenants have not yet fallen into line with them'.<sup>65</sup>

The 'Kisan pledge' to be taken on the formation of each new Kisan Sabha, which was drawn up in May or June 1920, still looked to the landlord (Thakur) for justice and protection from his oppressive agents (*ziladars*, peons and so on). It read as follows:

<sup>61</sup>*Nazrana* was the premium demanded from a tenant to allow him onto, or let him stay on the land. *Hathyana* and *motorana* were imposts levied on the peasants when a new elephant or a motor-car was bought by the landlord.

<sup>62</sup>U.P., GAD 50/1921, Kws: Commnr., Lucknow to Chief Sec., U.P., 14 Jan. 1921.

<sup>63</sup>H.R. Nevill, *Rae Bareli: District Gazetteers of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh*, vol. 39, (Lucknow 1923), p.95; Siddiqi, op. cit., pp. 160-1.

<sup>64</sup>Faunthorpe's Report, p. 273.

<sup>65</sup>Mehta's Report, p. 57.

1. We Kisans shall speak the truth—not the untruth—and tell our story of woe correctly.
2. We shall not brook beating or abuses from anyone; we shall not lay our hands on anyone but if a ziladar or peon raises theirs on us we, five or ten of us, will stay his hand. If anyone abused us we shall jointly ask him to restrain himself. If he would not listen we would take him to our Thakur.
3. We shall pay our rent at the proper time—and insist upon a receipt. We shall jointly go to the house of the Thakur and pay the rent there.
4. We shall not pay illegal cesses like *gorawan* [*ghodawan*], *motorawan*, *hathiawan*. We shall not work as labourer without payment. If any peon catches hold of a Kisan (for forced labour) the rest of the villagers will not take their meals without setting him free. We shall sell *upli* (cow dung cakes), *patai* (sugarcane leaves for thatching) and *bhusa* (straw) at slightly cheaper than the bazaar rate but we shall not supply these articles without payment.
5. We shall not quarrel and if we do we shall settle it by a panchayat. Every village or two to three villages combined will form a panchayat and dispose of matters there.
6. If any Kisan is in trouble we shall help him. We shall consider other Kisans' joys and sorrows our own.
7. We shall not be afraid of constables. If they oppress [us] we shall stop him [them]. We shall submit to no one's oppression.
8. We shall trust in God and with patience and zeal we shall try to put an end to our grievance[s].<sup>66</sup>

Later a spokesman for the peasants explained, with reference to clause 4 above, that the amounts of *bhusa*, *upli*, etc. traditionally given, would still be provided free of charge; it was only anything demanded in addition that would have to be paid for as specified. And in October 1920, shortly after his liberation from Pratapgarh jail on account of the mass demonstrations of his followers, Ramchandra promulgated the rates of the customary dues, like *hari* and *bhusa*, *karbi* and *bhent*, that peasants were to pay.<sup>67</sup> It is in the light of the peasant's notion of a moral world, rather than in the simple terms of 'moderate' and 'radical' borrowed from elite discourse,

<sup>66</sup>This translation is found in *ibid*, pp. 109-10. The pledge appears over the name of Gauri Shankar Misra, vice-president, U.P. Kisan Sabha, but its language and Ramchandra's reconstruction of it in his writings (see undated, incomplete letter in Ramchandra Colln. I, File No. 1), suggest that Ramchandra and other local people had a major hand in drawing it up.

<sup>67</sup>Mehta's Report, p. 110.

that this position might best be understood. It is in this light too that we might comprehend the 'not altogether simple' demands<sup>68</sup> of the 3000 peasants led by Baba Janki Das and others, who besieged the house of Thakur Tribhuvan Bahadur Singh of Chandanian (Rae Bareli) on 5 January 1921 to obtain an end to ejection and 'the turning out of a prostitute in the Taluqdar's keeping'.

The religious-ethical aspect of the peasants' demands was evident also in the oath taken by villagers in northern Awadh to signify the support of their villages for the Eka movement in the latter part of 1921 and the early months of 1922. An elaborate religious ritual accompanied the oath-taking. A hole dug in the ground and filled with water represented the sacred river Ganga. Over this, and in the presence of all the villagers—summoned, officials averred, by means of abuse, threats and social boycott—a pandit recited a prayer. A collection of four annas or more per head was made, and part of this was used to pay the pandit for his services. Finally, an oath was administered and a panchayat formed in order to settle disputes in the village. By the various injunctions of the oath, the peasants bound themselves to:

1. Refuse to leave their fields if illegally ejected.
2. Pay only the recorded rent.
3. Pay rent regularly at the agreed times.
4. Refuse to pay rents without being given receipts.
5. Refuse to perform *begar* for zamindars without payment.
6. Refuse to pay *han* and *bhusa*.
7. Refuse to pay for the use of irrigation tanks.
8. Refuse to pay for grazing cattle on jungle and pasture lands.
9. Give no help to criminals in the village.
10. Oppose oppression by the zamindars.
11. Take all disputes to their own panchayat and abide by its decision.<sup>69</sup>

There are several points of similarity between the Eka oath and the earlier Kisan Sabha pledge. In both a traditional peasant morality finds expression. There was a proper share that the superior classes might claim: this was to be met promptly. Crime was to be opposed (Eka oath), truthfulness and trust in God maintained (Kisan Sabha pledge). Yet both emphasized, at the same time, the peasants' need for unity and self-help, especially reliance on their own panchayats for the purpose of settling all internal disputes.

<sup>68</sup>Siddiqi, *op cit.*, p. 154.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 201-2.

It seems evident that there was already, in the earlier stages of the peasant movement, a growing tension between the traditional structure of agrarian society and the peasants' insistence on implementing traditional practice. Thus rents would be paid, but only if receipts were provided. Customary cesses would be met, but not any demand for larger quantities than usual, nor any new and illegal imposts. More generally, the peasants would resist oppression by the police and the landlord's agents, although they might still turn to the landlord for arbitration.<sup>70</sup> By the time of the Eka movement, this tension had been resolved to some extent by the adoption of a more militant stand against the traditional system as a whole. A commitment was still made to pay rents as agreed between landlord and tenant, but this was no longer the case even with customary cesses such as *hari* and *bhusa*. The peasants would no longer perform *begar* without remuneration, or pay for the use of irrigation tanks or pasture lands; for water, like air, was a gift of God, and the jungles and other uncultivated lands had for long (before the arrival of the British legal system and record of rights) been used in common. Finally, the peasants now declared their determination to resist any attempt to evict them illegally from their fields, and indeed to oppose all oppressive acts of the landlords. The surviving elements of deference, found in the expression of hope of justice from the landlord in the Kisan Sabha pledge, had disappeared.

This change of tone reflects another feature of the powerful peasant movement under discussion, its ability to overcome some of its own traditionalist limitations. Seeing how their landlords had acted, the Awadh peasants were learning to defend their interests. Many of the old links between the landlords and their tenants, labourers and other servants, had been eroded by the imposition of British order, the registration of rights, rigorous collection of rent, revenue and interest, the enforcement of all this in the courts of law, and most recently the exceptional pressure brought to bear on the peasantry during the First World War. Now, with the emergence of the Kisan Sabhas (working at times in association with Congress and Liberal volunteers) and the later Eka associations, the peasants' subservience broke down further.

<sup>70</sup>At another level the use of the traditional greeting 'Sita Ram' reflected the same tension—since it was promoted in part to do away with the peasant's consciousness of hierarchy and attitude of deference, and was opposed (as we have observed) by members of the more privileged classes

Soon they launched into a more open attack on the old order. The movement had entered upon a significant new phase.

For the beginnings of this phase we have to look back to the events of December 1920 and January 1921. The great Kisan Congress at Ayodhya on 20 and 21 December 1920, attended by some 80-100,000 peasants, appears to have marked the turning point. After the Congress, the peasants first lay on the rails until they were permitted to travel home on the trains without purchasing tickets; then, back in their villages, took to protracted discussion of the events and decisions of the meeting 'in the local panchaits [panchayats] which have since been formed in almost every village'.<sup>71</sup> For the first time, an official commented, these villagers 'had begun to realise the power of an united peasantry—to realise that they themselves had the remedy of the most flagrant of their wrongs, the illegal exactions of the landlords, in their own hands'.<sup>72</sup>

By January 1921, another official reported after an investigation in Faizabad division, while most tenants professed 'a certain amount of attachment to the estates to which they belong', they appeared 'firmly determined to obey their [Kisan Sabha] leaders'. He went on to comment on the mass meeting scheduled to be held at Unchahar in Rae Bareli district on 15 January 1921, at which it was said Ramchandra would decide whether future rents were to be paid or not: 'The organization of the tenants' sabhas is now so far complete that it is probable that these orders will carry great weight, if [they are] not implicitly obeyed.'<sup>73</sup> As in Allahabad, a new authority had arisen. 'Gandhi's word is supreme.' Baba Ramchandra will be 'implicitly obeyed'.

As it happened, the peasants did not wait for the word of Gandhi, or of Ramchandra who was by this time working in close association with the leaders of the Non-cooperation Movement. It is evident that the presence of Gandhi and the Congress, and rumours regarding Gandhi's achievements in Champaran, were an important source of inspiration to the Awadh peasant in these years. The support of local Congressmen, Khilafatists and Liberals, and the intervention of men like Jawaharlal Nehru was also of consequence, helping to further inject the Kisan Sabhas with

<sup>71</sup>U.P. GAD 50/1921, Kws: St. John Farnon, Dy. Commnr., Rae Bareli, 19 Jan. 1921.

<sup>72</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., Commnr., Faizabad to Chief Sec., U.P., 14 Jan. 1921.

nationalist symbols and slogans and of course giving them wider publicity. Yet, one must not exaggerate the role of the urban politician in the growth of the movement. Any suggestion that it was the Congress (or the Liberals) who politicized the peasantry and thus drew the Awadh peasant into the wider campaign against the British Raj, is belied by timing of the peasants' revolt and the violence of their actions.

It is clear that masses of peasants returned from the Ayodhya Congress with their own unexpected interpretation of the stated purpose of the gathering: 'to end landlord atrocities'. Ramchandra had appeared at the Congress bound in ropes, a dramatic gesture alluding to the bondage of the Awadh peasantry. Before the end of the conference he agreed to throw off his ropes since 'owing to the gathering, ejectment had already been done away with'.<sup>74</sup> The peasant audience took this act literally. Ejectment symbolized the oppressive authority of the landlords, and over the next three months this authority was attacked time and time again. The period saw widespread rioting in Rae Bareilly, Faizabad and Sultanpur districts, and the extension of protest into other areas over matters that had not until then been brought into contention.

From the Faizabad division, officials reported a 'general refusal' to till the landlord's *sir* in Pratapgarh, Sultanpur and parts of Faizabad district.<sup>75</sup> The Raja of Pratapgarh, a leading taluqdar, received confirmation of the changed character of the struggle in January 1921 when he found tenants refusing his 'liberal' offer of fourteen-year leases which they had a short while earlier readily accepted. Around the same time, protests were beginning to be heard against demands for *rasad* and *begar* in Bara Banki, a district that had remained largely unaffected by the Kisan Sabha movement until then.<sup>76</sup>

In January 1921 there were also several instances of attacks on landlord property. These were concentrated in Rae Bareilly district and the Akbarpur and Tanda tehsils of Faizabad district, but occurred elsewhere too. In Rae Bareilly large bands appeared in several estates, destroying the taluqdars' crops and looting and destroying their storage places. 'From 5 January for some days the

<sup>74</sup>Siddiqi, *op cit.*, pp. 148-9.

<sup>75</sup>*Sir*: land held by the landowner under title of personal cultivation.

<sup>76</sup>U.P. GAD 50/1921 Kws: letters of Commrns., Faizabad and Lucknow Division to Chief Sec., U.P., 14 Jan. 1921.



district was practically in a state of anarchy.' In Pratapgarh there was an assault on the *ziladar* of Raja Bahadur Pratap Bahadur Singh. In Faizabad the terminal weeks of 1920 and the early days of 1921 brought isolated attacks on the servants of taluqdars, and the looting and burning of their straw. Then, following a meeting on 12 January 1921, which led to an attack on and the looting of the zamindars of Dankara, widespread rioting broke out in the district. Bands of 500-1000 men, women and children marched from place to place for the next two days, settling scores with their enemies.<sup>77</sup>

By this time, as we have already observed, many of the lower castes and landless labourers were involved in the agitation. At Fursatganj and Munshiganj bazars in Rae Bareilly district, where police firing occurred on 6 and 7 January 1921 respectively, the multi-caste composition of the crowds was especially noted. Among these crowds were numbers of Pasis and members of other 'criminal' tribes who constituted a substantial section of the labouring population of the district. The prominence of the latter was attested to again by the official view that they were responsible for the 'indiscriminate' looting of village bazars and the concentration of rioting in the south-eastern tehsils of Rae Bareilly.

In Faizabad, it was reported, Brahmans and Thakurs were not 'generally' in the movement, but 'all the lower castes are affected'. The rioters were said to consist chiefly of Ahirs, Bhars, Lunias and the untouchable Pasis and Chamars, i.e. the castes that provided the majority of the small tenants and agricultural labourers. Deo Narain, one of the two major Kisan Sabha leaders active in the district (the other was Kedar Nath), appears to have concentrated his propaganda efforts among the *halwas* (labourers) of the Brahman and Thakur zamindars and tenants, organizing them into numerous Kisan Sabhas. Consequently Pasis, Chamars, Lunias and other labouring castes were to the fore in the riots in Akbarpur and Tanda tehsils: they plundered the houses of high-caste villagers and their women too came out to attack the high-caste women.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>77</sup>Siddiqi, *op cit.*, p. 165.

<sup>78</sup>U.P., GAD 50/1921 Kws: St. John Farnon to Dy. Commnr., Rae Bareilly, 19 Jan 1921; U.P. GAD 50/3/21. telegram from Commnr. of Faizabad to U.P.A.O., Lucknow, 16 Jan. 1921; and L. Porter to Governor, 19 Jan 1921, report of interview with Raja Tawaqul Husain of Pirpur; also Siddiqi, *op cit.*, p. 166 and Panigrahi, *op cit.*, p. 95. C.A. Bayly has noticed the same sort of development in the neighbouring Allahabad district: by December 1920, he writes, the 'enraged lower peasantry had been joined by landless labourers,

The interests of the landless labourers and the smaller, unprotected tenants of Awadh converged to a large extent. And after December 1920, the actions of the peasants highlighted the concerns of these sections of the rural poor. Their attacks were extended to the bazars and other points where wealth was concentrated. The chief targets were the *baniyas* (merchants) who had exploited the difficult times to make large profits, but *sunars* (goldsmiths), weavers and others who were thought to have profited from the situation were also attacked in some places. Stores of grain belonging to the taluqdars were looted and destroyed. The houses of upper caste and prosperous villagers were attacked, and quantities of clothes, jewels and so on burnt and destroyed.<sup>79</sup>

At this more advanced stage of the struggle, the peasants also identified more clearly the forces that were ranged against them.<sup>80</sup> In Faizabad the targets of the peasants' violence spread out from the taluqdars and their direct agents to patwaris,<sup>81</sup> small zamindars, large cultivators and the high castes in general. They now covered all those who were on the side of the 'enemy'. This explains the attacks on upper-caste tenants, for as the Commissioner of Faizabad observed, many of these in Faizabad (and in Sultanpur) belonged to 'the same clans as the landlords' and 'opposed the formation of Sabhas in their villages'. Indeed, at this stage the higher castes in Faizabad turned more openly against the movement, welcomed the police, and on the latter's arrival 'plucked up spirit' to defend their property.<sup>82</sup>

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suddenly caught by the rise in prices and the sharp turn of the labour market against them after the good months following the influenza epidemic of 1918. Offences against the liquor laws and attacks on the police by Pasis became frequent and in north Allahabad and Patti [Pratapgarh district] disorderly 'swarajya' crowds composed of unemployed Pasi and Chamar labourers became increasingly active during the next six months.' Bayly, 'The Development of Political Organization in the Allahabad Locality' (Oxford D. Phil. thesis, 1970, pp. 369-71, 382.)

<sup>79</sup>U.P. GAD 50/3/1921, Siddiqi, op. cit., pp. 151-3, 165

<sup>80</sup>Siddiqi seems to accept the contemporary officials' view that the peasants were 'indiscriminate' in their attacks, and describes the local Sabhas as becoming 'totally anarchic' 'at the level of action' (ibid., p. 154). Yet the weight of the evidence points to a quite different conclusion, in spite of the instance Siddiqi singles out of an attack on weavers by 'some ten men' (ibid., pp. 150, 153.)

<sup>81</sup>In Awadh the patwari was looked upon as a servant of the landlord though he also performed several duties for the Government. Metcalf, *Land, Landlords and the Raj*, pp. 302-3.

<sup>82</sup>U.P., GAD 50/3/21: Commnr. of Faizabad to Chief Sec., U.P., 24 Jan. 1921; & U.P., GAD 50/1921 Kws: Commnr. of Faizabad's telegram and letter of 16 & 17 Jan. 1921; also Panigrahi, op. cit., p. 97.

It was in the very nature of these developments that the peasant rebels should soon come into direct confrontation with the law-enforcing authorities, who were unquestionably on the side of their enemies. An official diagnosis suggested in February 1921 that

the kisans have come to appreciate the strength of numbers and having successfully defied the landlords are quite ready to defy Government authority. They have to a large extent lost all fear of the police.

It also reported a growing feeling of antagonism towards Europeans and the abuse of policemen for deserting their countrymen and serving an alien race. An important part of the local Kisan Sabha propaganda at this stage declared the taluqdars to be 'evil creations' of the Government; or, alternatively, described the Government as being 'in league with taluqdars, as guilty of murders and crimes, and above all as being condemned by Gandhi'.<sup>83</sup> All this had little to do with the Congress leaders. It was rather a product of the experience gained by the peasants in the course of their struggle. Given the structure of the colonial administration, the necessity of opposing European officials and the police arose from the very fact of opposing the landlords. This is evident from an examination of the circumstances surrounding even a few of the clashes between the peasants and the police in the Awadh countryside.

In the village of Sehgaon-Pacchimgaon, the peasants were aroused by news of the demonstrations and battles at Fursatganj and elsewhere in Rae Bareli district. In this situation they accepted the leadership of the dispossessed Kurmi co-sharers earlier mentioned and responded to their appeals to unite against the landlord. After the third week of January 1921 tension increased in the village. The villagers set loose the zamindar's cattle to graze on his sugarcane fields. Then, on a bazar day, they gathered and threatened to attack the landowner. The police intervened—to be attacked by the peasants. 'One constable was killed by a *lathi* blow, which smashed the back of his skull. The others retired two or three hundred yards using their guns.' It was some time before the so-called 'ringleaders' could be arrested and the crowd dispersed.

Not long after this event another major clash occurred near the railway station of Goshainganj in Faizabad district. Here the

<sup>83</sup>U.P. GAD 50/3/21: Hailey's 'Note' enclosed with Hailey's letter to Lambert, 1 Feb. 1921.

pretender Ramchandra, who will by now be familiar to the reader, was active for several days in the last part of January 1921, advocating the non-payment of rent and apparently also the doctrine of 'land to the tiller'. Propagandists like him, officials observed, made 'the strongest appeal to the low castes and landless castes who are always little removed from starvation and are told that a millenium in the shape of swaraj is coming through the intervention of Mahatma Gandhi'. The Goshanganj Ramchandra actually did better. Such was his following for a short while that he was able to return land to peasants who had been ejected and order the expulsion of others 'not true to the cause'. On 29 January 1921, then, it required a force of some seventy mounted policemen to arrest this one man. That afternoon crowds gathered thinking that he was to be taken away by a train at that time, and lay on the tracks to prevent the train from moving. When a large police force came forward to remove them, the peasants responded by attacking them with bricks lying near the station. The police had to fire thirty-three rounds before the crowds dispersed.

Later, in March 1921, the familiar sequence of mobilization against a landlord (in this case a widowed landlady) and then against the police when they intervened, occurred at Karhaiya Bazar in Rae Bareilly district. In this area Brijpal Singh, a demobilized soldier from Pratapgarh, Jhanku Singh, another ex-soldier, Surajpal Singh and Gangadin Brahman, delivered numerous 'objectionable speeches' in the first three weeks of that month. A meeting, scheduled to be held at Karhaiya Bazar on 20 March, the weekly market day, was prohibited by the authorities, and orders issued for the arrest of the 'agitators'. But on that day, the peasants battled with the police, trading brickbat for buckshot, and rescued Brijpal Singh and Jhanku Singh when the police tried to arrest them. Indeed, the police were forced to retreat into the taluqdar-in's house and here they were besieged by 'a yelling mob of several thousand people'. The arrival and direct orders of the white Sahib, the English Deputy Commissioner, failed to move the peasants. They continued their vigil all night and maintained a barricade the next morning to prevent 'motors' from entering or leaving the courtyard of the house. Another round of police firing was necessary before the peasants withdrew and their leaders were arrested. Jhanku Singh who was shot during the firing, later succumbed to

his injuries, and at least two other peasants are known to have been killed.<sup>84</sup>

The transformation that had taken place in the Awadh peasants' struggle was recognized by the Magistrate at Pratapgarh who reported that what had started as a 'genuine tenants' agitation' soon assumed an 'openly political form' [*sic*].<sup>85</sup> In Faizabad, an official summary informs us, the result of the lectures delivered every three or four days all over the district by Deo Narain Pande, Kedar Nath Sunar and Tribhuvan Dutt was that

meetings are held nightly in every village and a regular system of non-co-operation is being preached. Cultivators are told not to go to the courts, or to the tahsil or to the police, and to pay no rent. [emphasis added.]

At one of these nightly meetings, at which two police constables were beaten and slightly hurt, a number of papers were confiscated from the speaker: in the main, these were petitions to Gandhi describing various grievances regarding the peasants' fields, but they also consisted of two lists of men to be appointed to the posts of Deputy Commissioner, 'Kaptan Sahib' (i.e. Superintendent of Police), Daroga, etc.<sup>86</sup> In Karhaiya, as in Goshainganj (Faizabad), there is evidence of the rebels having established something in the nature of a parallel government. Brijpal Singh and Jhanku Singh in the former, and 'Ramchandra' in the latter, held frequent panchayats and tried criminal cases. Some villages in Rae Bareilly even elected their own Deputy Commissioners, who then tried local cases.<sup>87</sup> In Tajuddinpur village in the district of Sultanpur, at about the same time, 'for a few weeks *swaraj* was proclaimed and a parallel government set up'.<sup>88</sup> It was a measure of the distance that the Kisan Sabha movement had traversed between the end of 1919 and the early months of 1921.

At this point the peasant movement in Awadh was more or less abandoned by the Congress leadership, and an emboldened admin-

<sup>84</sup>The last three paragraphs are based on Siddiqi, *op. cit.*, pp. 160-1, 162-3, 168-70 and U.P., GAD 50/2/1921 Judgement of Khan Bahadur Md. Abdus Sami, Magistrate First Class, Rae Bareilly, 25 April 1921, in Criminal Case 69, King-Emperor v. Brijpal Singh & others.

<sup>85</sup>Report on the Administration of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, 1921-22 (Allahabad, 1922), pp. 31-2.

<sup>86</sup>U.P., GAD 50/3/21: L. Porter to Governor, 19 Jan. 1921: report of interview with Raja Tawaqul Husain of Pirpur, and Hailey to Butler, 24 Jan. 1921.

<sup>87</sup>Faunthorpe's Report, p. 273.

<sup>88</sup>Gopal, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

istation advanced to crush it—through the arrest of all of the most important peasant leaders, Ramchandra, Deo Narain and Kedar Nath among them, the widely publicized,<sup>89</sup> but ultimately trivial, amendment of the Awadh Rent Act, a sustained campaign of propaganda on behalf of the Government and a massive display of armed force.<sup>90</sup> Yet the movement was far from finished. Towards the end of November 1921 it burst forth again in the form of the Eka campaign.

The revival of the movement in this novel form may have owed something to an All-India Congress Committee resolution in November 1921 sanctioning 'full civil disobedience' including the non-payment of taxes. It was also encouraged initially by the efforts of certain Congressmen and Khilafatists based at Malihabad in Lucknow district, from whom it was suggested the movement got its new name—'Eka' or 'Aika' for unity. However, the Eka associations spread swiftly and it was not long before 'they got out of the control of the Congress people who were quite annoyed about it'.<sup>91</sup>

In Hardoi district, where the Eka movement first took root, tenants began to organize locally towards the end of 1921 to resist landlord attempts to collect more than the recorded rent. In Bahraich in early January 1922, there were two occasions on which tenants beat up *thekadars* (long-term lease-holders who collected rents on behalf of the taluqdars) and carried away the grain extracted from them as rent. Later that month bands of tenants were reported to be moving from village to village in the district demanding the immediate abolition of grain rents, through which the taluqdars and *thekadars* reaped virtually all the benefits of high prices. In Kheri district, the arrest of a Congress volunteer was the occasion for a demonstration by a considerable gathering,

<sup>89</sup>On 13 Jan. 1921, the U.P. Government telegraphed to various newspapers and to the Associated Press a press communique along the following lines: 'With reference to the suggestion that an enquiry must be held into the relations between the landlords and tenants in Oudh the Government is in possession of full information and has already decided to take up the question with a view to early legislation.' Further, 'Sir Harcourt Butler [the Governor] hopes as an old friend of both the landlords and the tenants of Oudh that they will avoid all action likely to cause a breach of the peace and will trust the Government to do justice.' (U.P., GAD 50/1921 Kws.) The Government also telegraphed all Dy. Commrs. to 'have intention to legislate published in every Tahsil' (UP GAD 50/3/21).

<sup>90</sup>P.D. Reeves, 'The Politics of Order: "Anti-Non-Cooperation" in the United Provinces, 1921', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 25:2 (1966): Butler Colln., vol. 21, Butler to H.E. Richards, 4 Feb. 1921.

<sup>91</sup>Faunthorpe's Report, p. 274.

which besieged the police station and released the man. In the village of Kothi in Bara Banki district, again, the peasants' wrath was aroused; here a zamindar's peon was killed in March 1922 when he tried to collect rents.<sup>92</sup>

These and other such incidents reflect the force of the peasant movement as it swept through Hardoi, Bahraich, Kheri, Bara Banki, Sitapur and Lucknow districts. By the end of January 1922 the movement was very strong indeed in the Sandila tehsil of Hardoi district, and the landlords of the area more than a little perturbed. In February 1922 one police circle in Hardoi reported twenty-one Eka meetings in three days, with assemblies of 150 to 2000 people. In the same month Kishan Lal Nehru visited Atrauli (Hardoi district) in order to try and reassert a Congress hold on the movement. But he found that Madari, an untouchable Pasi by birth who had become the acknowledged leader of the Eka movement, was 'in full command'. Indeed at this stage, as the movement spread to thirty more villages, Madari completely severed his connections with Malihabad and shifted the Eka headquarters to Sandila in Hardoi district.<sup>93</sup>

Yet this symbolic and significant break from the Congress did not make the Eka movement any less 'political', even if we take the narrow view of equating the political with the avowedly nationalist. On the contrary. The official report on the Eka movement, produced by Lieutenant-Colonel J.C. Faunthorpe, I.C.S., in April 1922, sought to draw a distinction on this ground between the Kisan Sabha and the Eka phase of the agitation. In the former, Faunthorpe wrote, 'the animosity of the peasants was directed entirely against the taluqdars and not against Government officials. In the Eka movement this is not so much the case.' The official biographer of Jawaharlal Nehru writes that 'though the Congress had little to do with the Eka Movement . . . the Eka associations soon began to pass political resolutions'. According to the police at the time, too, there was little to distinguish Non-cooperation from Eka in the preachings of men like Baba Garib Das, a Pasi turned *sadhu* who was active in Bara Banki in March 1922.<sup>94</sup> Perhaps the most striking evidence of all is Madari's attempt to extend the appeal of the movement at the very time

<sup>92</sup>Loc. cit.; Siddiqi, op. cit., pp. 196-204.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., p. 200 & n.; Faunthorpe's Report, p. 274.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., 273; Gopal, op. cit. p. 57; Siddiqi, op. cit., p. 204n

when he shifted its headquarters from Malihabad to Sandila. In order to do this, it was reported, he 'adjusted local differences' and urged zamindars to join the Ekas. In the weeks that followed, large numbers of petty zamindars did so.<sup>95</sup>

The provincial authorities in UP were in no doubt about the political implications of the Eka movement. From the end of 1921 they used their 'most autocratic powers' to break the Eka and the Congress organizations.<sup>96</sup> In Awadh this intervention again led to open clashes between the police and the peasants. When the police tried to arrest Madari in February 1922—having made 'arrangements on a somewhat elaborate scale'<sup>97</sup> for the purpose—several thousand peasants gathered to frustrate their effort. Indeed Madari was not to be apprehended until June that year, in spite of the handsome Rs 1000 reward that the authorities offered for his arrest. In March 1922 the peasants of Hardoi provided further evidence of their political feelings, when a large crowd of Pasis attacked a police party that was making inquiries about Eka meetings in village Udaipur in the Shahabad police circle. In the police firing that followed, two of the attackers were killed.<sup>98</sup> Ultimately the forces at the disposal of the Government proved to be too great for the proponents of Eka to match on their own. Confronted by large bodies of armed and mounted police and a squadron of Indian cavalry, the Eka movement went under.

### *Conclusion*

When peasant violence erupted in January 1921 to set off the debate on the social and political condition of Awadh, the British were quick to sum up its causes. 'It has for long been obvious that the Oudh Rent Act requires amendment.' 'In the worst managed taluqdars' estate . . . the tenants have been treated with such want of consideration and in some cases with such oppression by the

<sup>95</sup>Faunthorpe's Report, p. 281. Siddiqi argues that the participation of the small zamindars was 'not entirely political' He quotes the instance of one landowner whose involvement was attributed by officials to a desire to advance his personal interests, but then goes on to tell us that most of the zamindars who supported the movement did so either because they were Khilafatists or because of 'the crushing weight of the revenue demand which made them join the ranks of the tenants' (op. cit., pp. 206-7). It is not easy to conceive of many choices more political than that.

<sup>96</sup>Reeves, op cit., p. 273.

<sup>97</sup>Faunthorpe's Report, p. 274.

<sup>98</sup>Loc. cit. See also Siddiqi, op. cit., p. 204 & n.



landlords that one is compelled to sympathize with them.' The administrators themselves, fair-minded officials, representatives of a great empire, were above it all. Venerable justices of the peace, their influence would count, their neutrality could scarcely be called into question. The assessment turned out to be inaccurate. The days were gone when the Raj could pose as an impartial referee, standing on high and whistling 'foul play'. Local struggles tended more and more to get caught up in the general wave of anti-imperialism sweeping through India. Even as the officials in Awadh were making their pious pronouncements on the reasons for the 'disturbances', the peasants had begun to attack the symbols and servants of the British Raj.

The colonialists could never comprehend this development. Then and later their explanation of it was to be in terms of the ignorance of the Indian masses and the manipulation of them by self-interested politicians. Yet they needed no prodding to realize its potential consequences. They wavered for a brief moment in mid-January 1921, even asking the bigger and more 'responsible' nationalist and peasant leaders to mediate and bring their moderating influence to bear on the peasants.<sup>99</sup> Then they moved with determination—and 'sympathy' was less in evidence than armed and mounted police and contingents of Indian troops.

Other participants in the debate could not match such clarity of vision or firmness in action. It was a period of learning, of trial-and-error, and uncertainty all round—among the peasants as among their urban well-wishers. Gandhi and Nehru recognized and indeed stressed that the Awadh peasant movement was anterior to and independent of the Non-cooperation Movement, though there is evidence too of the interaction between the two and the strength one lent to the other. Hesitantly, yet surely, the Congress leaders were drawn into the conflict between the peasants and their oppressors. In the end, however, they came around to the view that if the peasants' struggle was allowed to continue, it might hinder the development of the national movement against the British. The interests of that 'larger' struggle, the need for 'national unity', necessitated the shelving of such sectional struggles for the time being. The argument appears to have a good deal of force in it and some recent historians have been tempted to

<sup>99</sup>U.P., GAD50/1921, Kws telegram from Commnr., Lucknow to Collector, Rae Bareli, 14 Jan. 1921.

accept it *in toto*. The grounds on which they do so, however, require closer examination.

A united front of the whole Indian people—landlords and peasants, millowners and manual labourers, feudal princes and the tribal poor—in the anti-colonial campaign was scarcely feasible: no major struggle for change anywhere has ever achieved such unity. If, then, the statement is diluted to one urging the 'widest possible unity' on the basis of the only demand held in common by most Indians, the demand for Swaraj, we are still in the position of begging the question. What did the demand for Swaraj in fact signify? Is the idea of liberation from colonial rule to be equated with the narrow vision of the eviction of the white man from India? It is doubtful if a single one of the more important Congress leaders had a notion of Swaraj that was restricted to the simple physical eviction of the British from Indian soil. Had this been the sum total of the nationalist demand, the British would in all probability have been willing to submit to it long before they did. The concept of Swaraj had inherent in it the idea of greater individual freedom, equality and justice, and the hope of accelerated national and consequently individual development. Whether articulated by a Gandhi, as in his *Hind Swaraj*, or a Nehru, as in Jawaharlal's 'socialist' phase, or by the humblest nationalist sympathizer, the idea of Swaraj had built into it the dream of 'a new heaven, a new earth'—increased participation by all in the making of the decisions that affected them, reduced burdens (of rents and other taxes and imposts), an end to oppression.<sup>100</sup> The question then was how best to organize to bring this about.

The appeal to the need for *national unity* in the pursuance of this goal is plainly rhetorical. It needs to be re-phrased in terms of an appeal for a *particular kind of alliance*, seen as being necessary for the furtherance of the anti-imperialist struggle. It should be evident that the nature of the Swaraj that eventuated from this struggle would depend very much on the nature of the alliance (the 'unity') that was forged. From this point of view, the Congress' insistence in 1921-2 on a united front of landlords as well as peasants and others, was a statement in favour of the *status quo* and against any radical change in the social set-up when the British finally handed over the reins of power. The advice to peasants to give up organizing

<sup>100</sup>See Saadat Hasan Manto's story 'Naya Qanoon' for an interesting portrayal of such expectations.

'meetings' and 'disturbances' and to leave politics to the professionals, was a statement against mass participatory democracy and in favour of the idea of 'trusteeship'—the landlords and princes acting as trustees in the economic sphere, Gandhi and company in the political. In the two and a half decades following 1922, sections of the Congress did abandon this stance, under the impetus particularly of the workers' and peasants' struggles that arose in various parts of the country during the years of the Depression and after. But the main body of Congressmen stood by the position worked out by Gandhi and other leaders in 1921-2.

The sort of alliance that the Congress leadership settled on at that juncture was of crucial significance in determining the future course of the anti-imperialist struggle in India. Yet it is too easy to present a scenario of a dynamic urban-based party conducting the struggle, and at certain points making a choice between a variety of passive onlookers who might be expected to sympathize with their objectives. Referring to the debate between pro-slavery (conservative) and abolitionist (liberal) writers on American slavery, Genovese has pointed out that both viewpoints treat the Blacks 'almost wholly as objects, never as creative participants in a social process, never as half of a two-part subject'.<sup>101</sup> So, in the case of colonial India, the peasants have generally been treated as beneficiaries (economically) of an increasingly benevolent system or victims of an oppressive one, 'manipulated' (politically) by self-seeking politicians or 'mobilized' by large-hearted, selfless ones. Both viewpoints miss out an essential feature—the whole area of independent thought and conjecture and speculation (as well as action) on the part of the peasant.

From the stand-point of many an Awadh peasant in the 1920s, we would suggest, there was a Gandhi different from the one we know and a promise of Swaraj also different from the one that we do not so much *know* as *assume*; just as from his predecessor's point of view there had been, in the nineteenth century, a 'benevolent' but inaccessible white queen, quite different from the 'benevolent' Queen addressed and perhaps seen by the western-educated Moderate members of the Indian National Congress. This man, with his own peculiar expectations of Gandhi and Swaraj, jumped into the fray in Awadh in the years 1919-22. Beginning with petitions,

<sup>101</sup>Eugene D. Genovese, 'American Slaves and their History' in A. Weinstein and F.O. Gatell (eds.), *American Negro Slavery* (New York, 1973), p. 186.

and demonstrations against the landlords's agents, he went on to show his faith in locally-organized panchayats in preference to the British courts, to non-cooperation with the railway authorities and further, in places, to a campaign for the non-payment of taxes and attacks on the landlords and the police. At the very moment of Gandhi's imaginative Non-cooperation Movement, he and thousands of his comrades arose to present a parallel and powerful challenge to the entire structure of colonial authority in UP. They threw up thereby the real and immediate possibility of an anti-imperialist movement very different from any until then contemplated by the urban nationalist leadership. And to press their point they marched scores of miles first, in June 1920, from Pratapgarh to Allahabad, and then, in the succeeding months, to several Kisan Conferences to meet their Congress leaders and learn from them how they should proceed.

It was not, thus, an abstract question of whom the Congress might choose as ally, and then educate and train for political action. The peasants of Awadh had already taken the lead in reaching out for an alliance. As Ramchandra put it:

It was felt that if we could link our Kisan movement with some established organization, or gain the support of well-to-do [privileged?] groups and lawyers, then this movement would become the future of India.<sup>102</sup>

As it happened, the Congress leadership declined this offer—on account of its concern for the maintenance of non-violence, its uncertainty as to the possible repercussions of encouraging a broad-based peasant movement, or a dim but growing awareness of its own class interests.

Recent statements on the peasant movement in Awadh have asserted that 'the Congress and the Liberals had helped the Kisans to stand on their feet'<sup>103</sup> and to 'defy not just the landlords but even the Government'.<sup>104</sup> How far and in what way this was true has already been indicated. For the sake of the completeness of the historical record, it needs also to be said that the same people helped, by their refusal of continued support, to bring the peasant movement to its knees. It has been argued, in addition, that while the Liberals appreciated the class interests of the peasants better

<sup>102</sup>Ramchandra Colln. I, Subject File No. 1: incomplete letter of 1939.

<sup>103</sup>Siddiqi, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

<sup>104</sup>Gopal, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

than the Congress—witness their support for the amendment of the Awadh Rent Act—‘the Congress, as a more advanced political force that wanted to end British rule in India, devoted its energies and attention towards preserving unity between different classes’.<sup>105</sup>

Here the historian faithfully reproduces the Congress leaders’ assessment of the peasant movement in Awadh as fundamentally misguided. On the basis of the evidence so far available, this is not a position that is easy to uphold. Indeed it may more reasonably be argued that, as their struggle matured, the peasants of Awadh sensed more accurately than the urban leaders did, the structure of the alliance that held up the colonial power in UP and the range of forces that might combine to fight it. The very ‘moderation’ of Madari Pasi’s effort to enrol the support of the smaller zamindars stands testimony to that. In this situation, a pronouncement of the error, or ill-timing, of the peasant movement can come only out of an uncritical acceptance of the Congress leaders’ point of view. It does not flow from an analysis of the actual conditions of anti-colonial struggle in the 1920s.

Madari, Sohrab, Isharbadi: three names, and the caste affiliation of the first-named (a Pasi), is all we know about these Eka leaders who, with others as yet unnamed, for several months in 1921 and 1922, guided a powerful peasant movement against the colonial régime and its local collaborators.<sup>106</sup> It is a telling comment on the importance that historians and others have so far attached to the history of the subaltern.<sup>107</sup> Some scholars have indeed expressed their prejudice quite plainly. ‘To organize was difficult enough, to

<sup>105</sup>Siddiqi, op. cit., p. 217.

<sup>106</sup>The long lists of ‘freedom-fighters’, *Svatantrata Sangram ke Sainik*, drawn up district by district, by the U.P. Government in connection with the celebration of the Silver Jubilee of Indian independence, does not contain entries for any of these leaders. Madari Pasi and the village he is supposed to have come from are mentioned in the introductory note to the volume on Hardoi district. In a brief visit to the district I sought to use this lead in order to try and find out more about Madari, only to discover that Madari never came from a village of that name, that a village with that name does not exist in the concerned tahsil, and that old Congressmen (mentioned in the list of ‘freedom fighters’) spoke of Madari as they would of a ‘bad character’ or at best an inconsequential one: so heavily does the élitist heritage sit upon us. I did not have the time to pursue my inquiries after Madari and other Eka leaders on that occasion, but feel sure that further effort will yield useful information.

<sup>107</sup>We use this term (as we use ‘elite’) as a convenient short-hand to distinguish the lower, labouring and exploited classes from the upper, relatively privileged groups in different parts of the society.

organize in the face of repression was not possible for Madari.' Thus Majid Siddiqi, in the only published monograph on the peasant movement in Awadh.<sup>108</sup> This comment on the configuration of forces then existing in the country betrays the elitist viewpoint of its author, for the picture appears very different from the peasants' perspective.

By the winter of 1921-2, the peasant movement in Awadh had overcome many, though by no means all, of its own traditionalist limitations. Yet, its localism and its isolation remained. To get over these it needed an ally among other anti-imperialist forces in the country. But the chief candidate for this role, the party of the growing urban and rural petty bourgeoisie, had turned its back on the peasant movement long before that time. What a commentator wrote on another popular struggle, in another time and another land, is perhaps more appropriate in the context:

The petty bourgeoisie encouraged insurrection by big words, and great boasting as to what it was going to do. [But] wherever an armed conflict had brought matters to serious crisis, there the shopkeepers stood aghast at the dangerous situation created for them; aghast at the people who had taken their boasting appeals to arms in earnest; aghast at the power thus thrust into their own hands; aghast, above all, at the consequences for themselves, for their social positions, for their fortunes, of [at?] the policy in which they were forced to engage themselves . . . Thus placed between opposing dangers which surrounded them on every side, the petty bourgeoisie knew not to turn its power to any other account than to let everything take its chance, whereby, of course, there was lost what little chance of success there might have been, and thus to ruin the insurrection altogether.<sup>109</sup>

<sup>108</sup>Siddiqi, *op. cit.*, p. 202n. Kapil Kumar has recently completed a doctoral dissertation on the peasant movement in Awadh, for the University of Meerut. When published, this should tell us a good deal more about the Eka movement.

<sup>109</sup>F. Engels, *Germany: Revolution and Counter-Revolution* (London, 1969), p. 105.

## APPENDIX

### Kishan Sabha in Allahabad

(Source: Government of India, Home Department, Political Branch, Deposit, February 1921, No. 13. Extracted from CID Memo No. 1052, dated Allahabad 7 January 1921, signed P. Biggame, Asst. to D.I.G., C.I.D. UP, SB).

The following note is the outcome of personal observations and enquiries after a month's tour in the trans-Ganges tract of the Allahabad district, where the Kishan Sabha agitation has been most acute.

There is a very noticeable stirring of the pathetic contentment of the masses, but the discontent lacks definite aims. After due allowance is made for the fact that the enquirer was a European official there can still be no doubt that up to the present at any rate the disaffection is directed against the landlords and is not in any way anti-British nor even anti-Government. Naturally the strength of the movement varies with the locality, it being strongest in places along the pucca roads where agitators were on the motor cars near the Partabgarh border and in big market villages where extremist meetings have been held. Get away even a mile or two from these special localities and there is very little active interest. Of course people have heard of meetings being held and Kisan Sabhas being formed at other places, but at present there is very little inclination to follow suit without direct instigation from outside. The distinction is generally freely admitted between the condition of land tenure in Oudh and in the Allahabad district, but still there is a great longing for the Permanent settlement (or Duncani Bandobast) as it exists in Jaunpur. The difference is very noticeable between the state of affairs in villages where the landlords are small men residing on the spot and on the estates of long absentee landowners, particularly on those of city *bantias* and *mahajans*, who have no interest in the tenants except what they can get out of them in the way of rent. It is freely recognised that the trouble there is that the landowners have to employ *Sujawals*, *karindas* and *sepoys* and it is these middlemen who are the cause of the oppression of the tenantry. There is nowhere any genuine objection to performing *hari* and *begari* according to immemorial custom for zamindars who are seen and known, but there is a tendency to kick against working for and supplying *nazrana*,

hathyana, motorana, etc. etc. for distant and unknown landowners at the bidding of foul mouthed karindas and sepoys. Everywhere however except in Court of Wards Estates where the tenants have no complaints of any sort the great outcry is against bedakhli, in spite of the large amount of marusi land held by cultivators in these parts. To what extent the outcry is justified can be better decided by some one more acquainted with the working of the revenue courts than the writer, but the word is in every person's mouth. The idea prevails that the zamindars are avoiding the pinch of rising prices by taking it out of their tenants, both in the form of nazranas and by raising rents. When enhanced rents are not paid, the tenants are evicted, or in some cases the land is given for ploughing to others, without even the formality of an ejection decree. It is all very well to argue that such proceedings are impossible under the law, and that the tenant has his redress in the courts. Whatever the facts may be the idea is firmly rested in the average cultivator's mind that this sort of thing is going on; and it is also a fact that there is very little faith left in the efficacy of the law courts as a means of obtaining redress. The idea is a fixed one that a poor man has no chance against a rich man in a contest in the courts, and who will say that there is not some truth in this under the system of civil and criminal justice as it has come to be practised in India? It is no use arguing with the cultivator that as a result of the prevailing high prices of food stuffs, he gets far and away more for his produce than he did, and that it is only fair that a ratio of the profits should go to the zamindar and to Government. His reply is that owing to the drought this year there has been little or nothing produced, and in any case cloth is so dear that he cannot afford to clothe himself and his children. This contention is unanswerable and the extent of the genuine distress is very great. It is naturally difficult for the Indian peasant who cannot see much beyond his nose either in space or time, to understand how the war has caused a world shortage of commodities and how the value of the currency has fallen. After all people in other countries with a greater claim to intelligence and education are as unreasonable on the subject of the high prices, and have a tendency to blame their Government of whatever form it may be. The Indian peasants' chief idea about the war is that they supplied the men and the money and [Government] issued them bits of paper instead. It will be noticed that these notions distinctly smack of Bolshevism, and it



would be interesting to know whether they are in some way the indirect result of Bolshevik propaganda, or have arisen from the same causes as have produced them in other countries. The Bolshevik idea is also rapidly spreading from the extremist areas mentioned above, that it is the cultivators who plough, sow, irrigate and reap and are thus entitled to the whole of the produce of the land. There is no need of, and no right to be such things as zamindars. Here again the contention of the cultivators is very hard to refute, as there is no denying the fact that the Indian landlord is singularly backward in the performance of his duties. The old class of small proprietor who acted the godfather to his tenants and helped them on the occasions of their domestic ceremonies is being rapidly bought out, and even he did practically nothing to improve the economic lot of the cultivators. The average zamindar is only concerned with collecting his rents and pays very little attention to improving the means of production, communication and irrigation on his estates. No doubt the system of sub-division of estates militates against such improvements being effected as a general rule, but the fact remains that the population cannot go on increasing and the standard of living be raised unless there is more intensive cultivation and increase in yield per acre. The general attitude of the zamindars is even less reassuring than that of the cultivators. Their only wish is for things to go on the same as ever. In only very few places in this district up to the present are they meeting with any organized opposition from the tenants and they are content to get on by the force of custom and prestige and to hope that things will not get worse. In the few places, as in some villages near the Partabgarh border where the tenants have combined to oppose and boycott them, and where they can get no redress owing to the solidarity of their opponents they are biding their time and relying on Government to put things right. There is no attempt to combine or form a political party. The position taken up by the zamindars is that they and their forefathers have been well-wishers of the British Government, and it is up to that government now to help them out of their difficulties. The curious part about the situation is that the vast majority of the cultivators also still look to Government as their only salvation. They can make no suggestions as to the remedy for their present distress; that is the function of Government. They have their grievances and their miseries and it is up to

Government to put things right. There is no other power under Heaven that can save them. *Upar Parmeshwar niche Sarkar*. They have generally heard the word *swaraj* but are quite incapable of explaining it. (In this perhaps they are not peculiar.) If they are told that it is the sarkar's own hukm that the government is to be handed over to Indians as quickly as possible they are filled with genuine consternation and quote instances of mismanagement under Indian officials. They all contend that such a thing is impracticable without unity among Indians themselves, and they are unanimous in the opinion that such unity is impossible. They allow that if even the cultivators of one village can combine they are then in a position to oppose the zamindar, but they generally refuse to admit that such union is permanently possible. Such a thing as any concerted action between Hindus and Muhammadans—in the opinion of the Muhammadan minority at any rate—is quite beyond the bounds of possibility. For the present then the cultivators like the zamindars are looking to Government to put their troubles right, and it is unfortunately undoubtedly true that they have completely failed to grasp the idea that they are themselves in a position to influence the decisions and policy of Government through the reformed councils and by that means to get the law altered if they choose to suit their ends. Up to within a few days of the General Election on the 30th November, hardly a soul in the villages had heard anything at all about councils or votes, and the whole system of representative government, in spite of District Board Elections, seems absolutely incomprehensible to the vast majority. In many places it was only when the non-cooperation agents spread about the injunction that votes were to be given to no one, that any one had heard of such a thing as a vote. Even then no one had any idea what it meant. It is no exaggeration to say that if there had been no non-cooperation agitation at all the elections in the rural parts of this district at any rate would have been even more of a farce than they actually were. It would have probably meant that the zamindars, subordinate officials and well wishers of the government wishful to make the Reform Scheme a success would have brought voters to the polling stations as they did recruits to the colours and subscriptions to the War Loan. The cultivators would have recorded their votes because it was a sarkari hukm and not with any conception at all of what they were doing. Even the election campaign conducted by Pandit Radha

Kant Malaviya through the Kisan Sabha proper seems to have educated only a negligible number of persons in the Handia tahsil. The elections occurred at a time when the cultivators were fighting the drought in order to produce some rabi crop. Every hour spent away from the irrigation well meant a certain loss of produce. Naturally the hard headed cultivator was glad of an excuse not to attend a function in which he took not the slightest interest. Two or three days before the election the candidates began a little propaganda in the form of distribution of leaflets, specimen voting papers, etc. These apparently made no impression. The method of attack adopted by the Moderate candidates seems to have been in the main to approach the zamindars and get them to round up some of their tenants at the polling stations. Those who went to the polling stations on the election day did so with a vague idea that they were going to attend some sort of sabha which was some affair of the zamindars. It was thus not difficult for the non-cooperation agents to persuade them that the whole thing was a ruse of the zamindars to get their signatures (or thumb impressions) on a paper which would lead in the end to *bedakhli*. The Indian villager is chary of giving his signature without knowing exactly what he is signing, and with good cause. Thus when it was announced to the hesitating assemblies that it was the order of Mr Gandhi that no votes should be given, every one heaved a sigh of relief and went home. The currency which Mr Gandhi's name has acquired even in the remotest villages is astonishing. No one seems to know quite who or what he is, but it is an accepted fact that what he orders must be done. He is a Mahatma or sadhu, a Pandit, a Brahman who lives at Allahabad, even a Deota. One man said he was a merchant who sells cloth at three annas a yard. Some one had probably told him about Gandhi's shop (the new Swadeshi store in Hewett Road). The most intelligent say he is a man who is working for the good of the country, but the real power of his name is perhaps to be traced back to the idea that it was he who got *bedakhli* stopped in Partabgarh. It is a curious instance of the power of a name. As mentioned above the Duncani bandobast is still a bye word in this part, and the writer was solemnly asked by more than one man whether he knew the Duncans and whether any of the family was now in India. Were a Duncan Sahib to come to settle the Allahabad district now, his name would probably supersede that of Gandhiji in a week. One cannot help being struck by the

chance that offers among a people of this nature to a real patriot, should one arise from among the people themselves, not from among the landowning or professional classes, to take the place of the notoriety hunters and Bolshevik agents who now pose as leaders of the people. For the present, however, the fact must be faced that Gandhi's word is supreme, and even the local hero Malaviji has been displaced, being accused of mispending funds entrusted to him. When votes were obtained by Radha Kant Malaviya by his agents, it was generally only because they told the voters: 'Gandhi Babu says you are not to vote at all, or, if you do, to vote for Malaviji.' The curious thing is that as a general rule Gandhi is not thought of as being antagonistic to Government, but only to the zamindars. The sarkar is still conceived of as something above and aloof from such consideration.

The Reformed Councils are just a ruse of the zamindars. We are for Gandhiji and the Sarkar. The reverence for Gandhi is undoubtedly partly due to the belief that he has great influence with the Government. If therefore the result of the new councils is legislation in favour of the zamindars the effect is likely to be disastrous. Undoubtedly what is required to allay the present unrest is some amendment of the Land Tenure Laws in such a way as to appeal to the imagination of the tenants. And the sooner some thing of the sort is done the better. At present, as stated above, the cultivators are much too busy irrigating their fields to be easily led away on any other tack. Should, however, the rabi fail as the kharif has done a delicate situation would be created. Generous remissions of land revenue would be the first requisite. But even if they were granted, assuming that Mr Gandhi's name continued in the ascendant till April, the mischief makers would be in a position to use it to create an ugly situation, in the panicky condition in which the people would then be. If on the other hand there are winter rains and the Land Tenure act is tackled in a liberal manner as the first business of the new council, Mr Gandhi's name will probably fade from people's memories as quickly as did that of the Germans after the first excitement at the outbreak of the Great War.

# The Indian 'Faction': A Political Theory Examined

DAVID HARDIMAN

For many scholars, the concept of 'faction' has provided a key to the understanding of Indian politics. Factions, it is believed, link the lowest in the land to the highest: the humble sharecropper is a member of his landlord's faction; the landlord is in one of the district-level factions; the district boss is a key member of one of the factions in the provincial legislative assembly; the provincial minister is a member of one of the all-India factions which go by such names as Congress (A), Congress (B), Congress (C), Janata (X), Janata (Y), Janata (Z). In this manner, factional networks are supposed to encompass the nation, linking the peasant masses to their rulers.

Paul Brass, in discussing the subject of Congress politics in post-independence Uttar Pradesh, writes:

. . . factional loyalties provide the link between the parochial units of Indian society—family, village, caste—and the political parties. Factional loyalty in the Uttar Pradesh Congress replaces party loyalty. Factional loyalty is an intermediate, perhaps a transitional, form of politics. It is something 'more' than parochial politics—a politics based on language, caste, tribe, or religion—and something 'less' than party politics in the European and American sense, involving an impersonal allegiance to a party as an institution or as an ideology.<sup>1</sup>

Historians have taken up this theme, seeking to project it back into the pre-independence period. B.R. Tomlinson, in his study of the

This essay has grown out of a long-standing discussion with Ranajit Guha, Gyan Pandey, David Arnold and Shahid Amin. Many of the ideas expressed here are as much theirs as mine, although I am of course responsible for the form in which they are expressed. In addition, Frank Perlin made some valuable suggestions for improving the argument.

<sup>1</sup>Paul Brass, *Factional Politics in an Indian State: The Congress Party in Uttar Pradesh* (California, 1978), p. 114.

Congress Party in the 1930s, after summarizing the theories of Paul Brass, states that he is '... trying to push some of the analysis of the political scientists back into the period before 1947'.<sup>2</sup> Another historian who has done this is S.N. Mukherjee in a study of the politics of early nineteenth-century Calcutta. In this study he places much emphasis on the importance of factions (*dals*) and faction leaders (*dalapatis*). In his words: 'The *dalapatis* also used the *dals* for modern politics, for both horizontal and vertical mobilization, to establish contacts in the *mofussil* areas and to exert pressure on their followers for agitation.'<sup>3</sup> According to Mukherjee, cosmopolitan faction leaders mobilized the support of their country clients, who, as members of the local rural elite and as faction leaders in their own localities, could in turn mobilize their own clients, the peasants. We are thus provided with an explanation as to how the elites mobilize the peasantry politically.

David Washbrook has developed this argument by seeking to explain how, over time, local-level factions became linked to provincial-level factions. In a book and a series of articles on the politics of Madras Presidency in the years between 1870 and 1920, he has argued that during the nineteenth century the rural elites—what he calls the rural-local bosses—had almost complete political power at the local level.<sup>4</sup> Each rural-local boss controlled a network of clients, such as tenants, employees and debtors, who were dependent on him in one way or another. These networks cut across caste and class. 'The political leader, who controlled a cross-communal network through terror, credit and administrative manipulation, remained far more powerful than the leader who relied for his position on the dictates of caste conscience or even on the formal writ of the boards and councils.'<sup>5</sup> The most important form of political activity at the local level was the factional conflict between such networks. 'The operational category of politics was the faction in which members, drawn from

<sup>2</sup>B.R. Tomlinson, *The Indian National Congress and the Raj 1929-1942* (London, 1976), p. 75.

<sup>3</sup>S.N. Mukherjee (eds.), 'Class, Caste and Politics in Calcutta, 1815-38', in Edmund Leach and S.N. Mukherjee, *Elites in South Asia* (Cambridge, 1970), p. 78.

<sup>4</sup>David Washbrook, 'Country Politics: Madras 1880 to 1930', in J. Gallagher, G. Johnson and A. Seal, *Locality, Province and Nation* (Cambridge, 1973); C.J. Baker and D.A. Washbrook, *South India* (Delhi, 1975); D.A. Washbrook, *The Emergence of Provincial Politics: The Madras Presidency 1870-1920* (Cambridge, 1976). In particular, see *The Emergence of Provincial Politics*, pp. 40-50.

<sup>5</sup>Baker and Washbrook, *South India*, pp. 171-2.

different castes, were held by transactional ties to a leader, and by which castes were divided.<sup>6</sup>

Washbrook argues that the power of the rural-local bosses was limited to a very local area until around 1910. It was only after this date, when important powers were granted to Indians on district local boards, that the rural-local bosses were forced to compete for power at the district level. 'Quite suddenly, rural-local bosses found themselves provided with a machine of tremendous power, which they could use to develop their support and crush their enemies: through control of taxation, contracts and services in the district they were given the means of extending their empires.'<sup>7</sup> As in conflicts at the local level, district-level conflicts were between competing factions. After 1920, with the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms, the rural-local bosses extended their factional conflicts to the provincial level. Therefore, modern Indian politics came to be characterized by conflicts along factional lines between rural-local bosses. The extension of such conflict to the district and provincial level had been brought about to a large extent by the constitutional reforms of the British.

The theory is a neat one; and, for a number of reasons, it has proved attractive to scholars. I do not, however, believe it to be correct. In this essay, I shall start by discussing my own reasons for rejecting it. I shall then go on to discuss the theory at a more general level, examining first how different scholars have used the concept of faction, and secondly asking why the concept has enjoyed such popularity.

## II

In the period between 1971 and 1977, I carried out detailed research into the history of the Indian nationalist movement in one Indian district, that of Kheda in Gujarat. In this area, the movement was at its height in the years 1917-34. Besides working in archives and local records offices, I carried out extensive interviews with many people who participated in the movement. In addition, I lived for some months in a single village for a better understanding of the movement at the village level. The findings

<sup>6</sup>Loc. cit. Also see *Locality, Province and Nation*, p. 178.

<sup>7</sup>*The Emergence of Provincial Politics*, p. 169.

have been published recently in book form.<sup>8</sup> During the course of the research, one of my chief concerns was to trace the local political networks and alliances which revealed themselves during the course of the nationalist movement. One of the questions that had to be asked was whether these took a 'factional' form.

Historians have generally agreed that the nationalist movement in Kheda District was supported most strongly by a community known as the Patidars.<sup>9</sup> The Patidars were the dominant caste of the area, owning much land and exercising a firm control over other agrarian resources. In class terms, some of the Patidars were large landlords, but the great majority were substantial peasant cultivators. It is thus possible to describe the Patidar *peasants* (in contrast to the large Patidar landlords) as a class in certain respects.<sup>10</sup> Because the Patidars were in such a strong economic position in rural Kheda, it was reasonable to assume that the important factions of the district would have been factions *within* the dominant caste, for factions formed from other peasant castes would have lacked political weight. At the outset, this hypothesis appeared plausible, for only a minority of Patidar peasants participated actively in the movement.<sup>11</sup> The problem was therefore to discover patron-client networks and conflict groups within the Patidar caste, and to reveal how these operated within the context of the nationalist movement.

At the district level there were powerful political leaders, some of whom were Patidars, some of whom were Brahmans and Vaniyas. These men were large landlords, money-lenders and entrepreneurs, as well as being caste leaders. Most powerful of all was the Desai family of Nadiad town, which was Patidar by caste. This family dominated the Nadiad town municipality, exercised considerable power within the Kheda District local board, and its members often represented Kheda District in the Bombay Legislative Council. Although the family owned large estates in the district, their political power rested not so much on their direct

<sup>8</sup>David Hardiman, *Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat: Kheda District 1917-1934* (Delhi, 1981).

<sup>9</sup>See, for instance, Judith Brown, *Gandhi's Rise to Power* (Cambridge, 1972), pp.88-111; D.N. Dhanagare, *Agrarian Movements and Gandhian Politics* (Agra, 1975), pp.35-45.

<sup>10</sup>This question is discussed at length in *Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat*, ch. 3, sec. 1, 'Caste and Class', pp. 31-6.

<sup>11</sup>As an example, in 1930-1, about 15,000 peasants migrated from their villages as a protest against the British. 87 per cent were Patidar by caste. The total Patidar population of Kheda District was well over 100,000. 1930-1 figures from *Census of India 1931*, pt I, Bombay (Bombay, 1933), pp.482-93.



control over an army of tenants, but on their position as caste leaders of the Patidars. Their position was maintained through a system of hypergamy, which operated as follows.

Different Patidar lineages were ranked on a scale which reflected their wealth and standing within the caste. The Desai lineage of Nadiad was considered to stand at the top of this hierarchy. The rule of hypergamy was that a daughter should be married on payment of a dowry into a 'superior' lineage. In this manner, Patidars of 'inferior' lineages were able to forge alliances with Patidars of 'superior' lineages. Such alliances were considered prestigious for 'inferior' Patidars and, in theory, advantages could be gained, such as patronage from the 'superior' Patidar family into which a daughter was married. In practice, the 'superior' Patidars took far more than they gave.

The political implication of this system was that many 'inferior' Patidars were dependent on the goodwill of 'superior' Patidars. The 'lesser' Patidar father who married his daughter to the son of a 'superior' Patidar dared not offend the family of the latter lest his daughter be victimized. 'Lesser' Patidars were often manipulated in a most cynical manner. It was not uncommon for a 'superior' Patidar to spend his dowry money and return his wife to her father so that he could marry for a new dowry. Amongst Patidars, it was considered very shameful to have to take back a daughter, and Patidars would do almost anything to avoid such a disgrace. As the 'lesser' Patidars who married their daughters into 'superior' lineages were often the richer and more powerful Patidars of their villages, this meant that the 'superior' Patidars possessed many influential allies in villages throughout the district. In this manner, we can see how big Patidar landlords, such as the Nadiad Desais, maintained political control over the Patidar leaders at the village level. According to the anthropologist, David Pocock, who carried out his field-work amongst the Patidars of Kheda, it is possible to describe these links through hypergamous marriage as factional.<sup>12</sup>

At the village level, the dominant Patidars were in many cases divided into minor lineages, known as *khadki*. As a rule, there were between two and about eight *khadkis* in each village. By tradition, each *khadki* inhabited a different street (*phaliya*), and as this was

<sup>12</sup> D. F. Pocock, 'The Bases of Faction in Gujarat', in *The British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 8, 1957, p. 300.

still the practice in many Patidar villages in the early twentieth century, the different Patidar groups in a village could often be distinguished by the section of the village in which they lived as well as by their ancestry. Each *khadki* was led by one or two elders (*matadars*). In a dispute between Patidars of different *khadkis*, Patidars were expected to side with members of their own *khadki*. In this, the *khadki* appears to have been similar to the *thok* of the Jats of Western Uttar Pradesh, as described by M.C. Pradhan.<sup>13</sup>

Each *khadki* had its own low-caste clients, such as tenants of the members, and craftsmen, artisans and sweepers, who were attached to a particular *khadki*. Thus, in the words of David Pocock, each Patidar lineage commanded a number of low-caste followers.<sup>14</sup>

Pocock does not regard the *khadki* as the only type of faction found in the Patidar villages of Kheda. In many disputes, alliances were formed on an economic rather than on an ancestral basis. Pocock cites a strong village faction which was formed around a group of Patidars who ran a company which owned several water-pumps in the area. Many peasants were dependent on them for their supply of irrigation water, and as a result they were able to act as a core-group in village disputes.<sup>15</sup>

A hypothetical factional network of Kheda District can thus be set out. At the top, exercising the levers of power, we can place the big patrons: the most powerful of whom were the Patidar Desais of Nadiad. Their clients were, we may say, in part the *khadki* leaders (*matadars*) of each village, and in part the powerful village landlords, money-lenders or entrepreneurs who commanded their own networks of clients. These village bosses, we may assume, controlled the mass of the village population: in part along lines of caste, but also through economic ties. In this manner we can link the district-level bosses to the peasant masses. The next task was therefore to discover whether these networks played a critical role in the politics of Kheda District during the period of the nationalist movement.

On the surface, there were grounds for thinking that factions were important. The leaders of the Gandhian movement in Kheda District were Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Darbar Gopaldas, both Patidars. Vallabhbhai Patel was a Patidar from one of the

<sup>13</sup>M.C. Pradhan, *The Political System of the Jats of Northern India* (Bombay, 1966), pp.124-5.

<sup>14</sup>Pocock, op. cit., p.299. <sup>15</sup>Ibid., pp.302-3

most prestigious lineages of the district, though his father was only a petty landlord. Darbar Gopaldas was the leading Patidar of Vaso village, and his lineage was considered to stand second only to the Desais of Nadiad in the Patidar hierarchy. He was a big landlord, with 200 acres of land in Vaso, small plots of land scattered around other villages of the area, and in addition he had two talukdari villages and a small princely state in Saurashtra (worth Rs 50,000 a year) to his name.

The Desais of Nadiad were, for the most part, opposed to the nationalist movement led by Vallabhbhai Patel and Darbar Gopaldas. In 1918, they demanded that the Kheda Satyagraha be called off, in 1920 they refused to boycott the legislative councils, and in 1930 they opposed the Civil Disobedience movement. Here, it may be thought, was a clear case of factionalism. Darbar Gopaldas, it can be argued, had set himself up as a 'Gandhian nationalist' so as to undermine the power of his old rivals, the Nadiad Desais. Vallabhbhai Patel, a member of an impoverished 'superior' Patidar family, can likewise be seen as venting his injured pride on the prestigious Nadiad Desais by establishing his own more powerful factional networks based on nationalist agitation. Kheda can thus be seen as conforming to David Washbrook's picture of the Andhra region of the Madras Presidency during the same period. 'In the Andhra deltas', Washbrook writes, 'men who lost out in the district boards or in the division of spoils by the administration were able to manufacture their own rival political systems based on agitation, protest and publicity.'<sup>16</sup>

Ultimately, it can be argued, the leaders of the nationalist faction succeeded in their designs. In 1925, the Congress Party won control over the Kheda District local board, and Darbar Gopaldas replaced the Nadiad Desai, Dadubhai, as president. Vallabhbhai Patel, for his part, had by the 1930s far greater political power than any Nadiad Desai. For instance, he exercised almost complete control over the nomination of Congress candidates for Gujarat seats in the 1937 elections. In this year, the Congress swept the polls. The minor faction of the 1920s had thus become the major faction of the 1930s.

On the surface, this interpretation of the politics of Kheda may appear plausible. The problems arise when we start to examine the history of the movement in detail. The first difficulty with the

<sup>16</sup> Washbrook, 'Country Politics: Madras 1880 to 1930', p. 210.

'factional' interpretation was that during these years Vallabhbhai Patel acted as an agitator rather than as a faction leader. Coming from a poor family, he had, during his early years, few powers of patronage at his command on which to build a political base of the factional type. He became the leader of the Patidar peasants because he was prepared to support and lead their no-revenue campaigns against the British revenue authorities. These agitations were, in all cases, initiated by the peasants themselves, so that Vallabhbhai Patel did not need to manipulate patron-client networks in order to be able to act as the leader of the peasants.<sup>17</sup>

Even when Vallabhbhai Patel had achieved a position of power, he did not use it to extend his influence in the normally accepted factional manner. The Indian faction leader is supposed to be driven by the desire to win seats for members of his faction in the legislatures, for with these at his command he can extend his powers of patronage. Vallabhbhai Patel, however, showed a marked antipathy to legislative councils. He boycotted all except one of the elections held under the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms, and before 1945 he himself refused even to sit in the legislatures. He did this because he believed that these elitist bodies could be of little service to the mass of the people while India remained under British rule. There is no doubt that he could have won a seat from Gujarat had he so wished.

The second difficulty with the 'factional' interpretation was that Darbar Gopaldas, likewise, failed to conform to the 'faction leader' stereotype. Again, his prime interest was agitation rather than the building of patron-client networks. Although he became president of the Kheda District local board in 1925, he only took the post because the nationalist movement was at a particularly low ebb at that juncture. As soon as the peasants became militant once more, he gave up the post (in 1928) to devote himself to agitation. Also, although he was a large landlord and influential 'superior' Patidar, he was not in a position to manipulate his peasant followers in the manner expected of faction leaders. As an example, let us take a case in which there was an unambiguous clash of wills between Darbar Gopaldas and a group of 'lesser' Patidar peasants.

In 1930, during the Civil Disobedience movement, various

<sup>17</sup>For details, see the sections in *Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat* on the early stages of the Kheda Satyagraha (1918), Borsad Satyagraha (1923) and Civil Disobedience (1930).

Patidars paid their land revenue to the British in defiance of caste council resolutions that they should not. In 1931, one of these caste councils decided to fine those who had broken the resolution. This fine, which was levied after the movement was called off, was seen by the British as a violation of the Gandhi-Irwin pact of March 1931, and because of this the local authorities demanded that the fines be repaid. Darbar Gopaldas tried to ensure that this was done, but all his powers of persuasion were insufficient to bring the return of a single pie. In the end, he was forced to repay the fines from Congress funds.<sup>18</sup> Thus, in a straight clash of authority between a much-respected 'superior' Patidar leader and a 'lesser' Patidar caste council, it was the 'lesser' Patidars who came out winners. It is, therefore, unconvincing to argue that the 'lesser' Patidar peasants were open to manipulation by district-level landlords and caste leaders such as Darbar Gopaldas.

The example is interesting because it reveals an important form of Patidar organization: the caste council or *gol*. *Gols* were formed through a voluntary agreement by the Patidars of a number of villages. During this period there were in Kheda *gols* of nine villages, fourteen villages, twenty-one villages and twenty-seven villages, amongst others.<sup>19</sup> The Patidars of each *gol* were considered to be of roughly equal status. *Gols* were formed to prevent ruinous hypergamous marriages with 'superior' Patidar lineages. The Patidars of each *gol* made a voluntary agreement to marry only within the *gol*, so that it became, in theory, an endogamous unit. Patidars who married outside their *gol* were fined or boycotted by other members of the *gol*. In protecting the 'lesser' Patidars against the 'superior' Patidars, the *gol* system helped to check the economic and political power of the great Patidar landlords. It provided only a check, not an impassable barrier, for many ambitious Patidars of 'lesser' villages were still prepared to break *gol* discipline by marrying their daughters into 'superior' lineages. But, on the whole, the large majority of Patidars conformed to *gol* discipline and married within their *gols*.

Here, therefore, we discover a strong form of subaltern organization within the Patidar caste which provided a check on the powers of the Patidar élite. We can see how this operated in

<sup>18</sup>Maharashtra State Archives, Home Dept. Special, 1931, File 750, pt 93.

<sup>19</sup>For full details see *Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat*, app. IV, 'Patidar Marriage Circles (Gol)', pp. 273-9.

another example from 1930-31. In June 1930, the Patidar *gol* of twenty-one villages met together and resolved to support the no-revenue campaign then being launched in support of the Civil Disobedience movement. Any Patidar of the *gol* who paid his land revenue was to be disciplined. One of the members was a powerful and ambitious landlord called Dhanabhai Patel. He had represented Kheda District in the Bombay Legislative Council from 1923 to 1926 as a Swarajist. He refused to accept the authority of the *gol* and paid his land revenue. In November 1930, the *gol* met once more, this time to discipline those members who had paid their revenue. Amongst those punished was Dhanabhai Patel, who was to be 'ostracized for life'. In May 1931, after Civil Disobedience had been called off, Dhanabhai Patel went to Gandhi and complained that he was still being subjected to caste boycott. Gandhi tried to arrange a compromise, but he was told by the leaders of the *gol* that Dhanabhai deserved to suffer. Thus, even Mahatma Gandhi was unable to break the solidarity of the Patidar *gol* of twenty-one villages.

This case serves to show that Patidar politics at the district level could not be understood in terms of patron-client networks and the machinations of manipulative elites. The Patidar peasants had their own organizations which could resist power-hungry landlords with great effect. In this respect, the solidarity of the *gol* was a form of class solidarity. Because of this, the nationalist movement in Kheda is best understood as a class-based movement rather than as a factional movement.

Factional analysis does not, therefore, help us to understand the nationalist movement at the district level. Perhaps, the reader may assume, it comes into its own when we look at the movement at the village level. Here, it may be supposed, we are likely to find a relationship between existing factional rivalries and the groups which either supported or opposed the movement.

To discover whether or not this was true, I had to examine the role played in the movement by two types of village conflict groups: first, the Patidar minimal lineage groups (*khadki*), and second, groups formed around political rivalries which cut across lines of the *khadki*. To examine the effect of *khadki* membership on support for the movement, I took the village in which I lived, Virsad, as an example. In Virsad, there were seven Patidar *khadki*. As a result of interviews, I managed to discover the *khadki* of

thirty-five of the forty-seven Patidar families who refused their land revenue in 1930 and migrated from the village as a protest against British rule. These thirty-five came from the seven *khadki* as follows: *khadki A*—12; *khadki B*—9; *khadki C*—4; *khadki D*—4; *khadki E*—2; *khadki F*—2; *khadki G*—2. *Khadki A*, *B* and *C* were the largest in the village and on numerical grounds alone could have been expected to have had the most activists. Likewise, those in Virsad who did not participate actively in the movement came from all seven *khadki*. I was forced, therefore, to conclude that *khadki* membership bore no relationship to participation in the movement.

There were, however, cases in which individual Patidars took advantage of the nationalist agitation to do down old rivals. Thus in Virsad the village headman, who remained loyal to the British, arrested one of his old rivals, a prominent Patidar landlord, and had him thrown into jail. In several villages (not Virsad, however) the British confiscated land as a punishment for revenue refusal and put it up for sale at very low rates. In a few cases, Patidars bought land confiscated from old rivals. This, however, was considered by the majority of Patidars to be a most shameful act. Amongst Patidars, there was a strong convention that personal rivalries should not be allowed to conflict with the interests of the Patidar community as a whole. As in 1930-31, most Patidars believed the Congress movement to be in the interests of their community, it was considered particularly reprehensible for a Patidar to take advantage of the no-revenue campaign to get even with personal enemies within the caste. Those who did invariably faced caste boycott. As a result, long-standing rivalries amongst Patidars played a marginal rather than structural role in the no-revenue campaign.

Factions, in addition to cutting through castes, are, in theory, supposed to link high-caste patrons to low-caste clients. If this was the case during the nationalist movement, we should expect to find that the lower castes of Kheda were brought into the movement by their patrons, the landowning Patidars. This again proved not to have been the case. In 1930-31, of the 15,424 people who refused to pay their land revenue and migrated from their villages, 87 per cent were Patidars. It might be argued that the lower castes owned very little land and were not therefore in a position to refuse their land revenue. This is only partly true, for many low-caste peasants

owned small plots of land the revenue of which they could have withheld if they had wanted to show solidarity with the cause. Very few, however, did so. Even more telling was the fact that in many villages the low-caste peasant actively opposed the no-revenue campaign. In late 1930 and early 1931 there was a spate of arson in Kheda in which low-caste peasants (often in league with the local police) burnt down the empty houses of Patidars who had refused their revenue and migrated from their villages. Even in villages in which no houses were burnt, the low castes took advantage of the absence of the dominant caste by breaking into and looting Patidar houses. These examples reveal that the Patidars had little control over the political allegiance of the low caste peasants of their villages, even though the low caste peasants were in many cases their tenants, debtors, and agricultural labourers. Once again, we discover that the vertical networks of patrons and clients were less important during the course of the nationalist movement than horizontal solidarities of an essentially class nature.

It is for all these reasons that one may feel justified in rejecting any factional explanation for the nationalist movement in Kheda District in favour of an explanation based on class analysis. Perhaps it will be argued that these findings apply only to nationalist agitations and that an agitational movement is a bad example to take as an illustration of factional politics (although this consideration has not prevented several historians from putting forward the view that nationalist agitations in India were essentially 'factional').<sup>20</sup> Let us therefore turn to the literature on factions in Indian politics to try to discover where and when the concept could be used.

### III

Difficulties emerge as soon as one tries to discover exactly what a faction is meant to be, for different scholars have used the term in quite different ways. Some define the faction as a group of people gathered around a core or a leader without whom the faction cannot exist.<sup>21</sup> This concept has been well expressed by a

<sup>20</sup>In addition to the historians already cited, see Gordon Johnson, *Provincial Politics and Indian Nationalism* (Cambridge, 1973).

<sup>21</sup>F.G. Bailey, *Stratagems and Spoils* (Oxford, 1970), p.52.



writer in *The Statesman*: 'A faction is like a cluster of bees round a queen bee. If the queen is damaged they quickly find another to cluster round'.<sup>22</sup>

A rather different type of usage contrasts factional conflict with class conflict. As factions consist of patron-leaders and client-followers, factions cut across class lines. In this case, the faction is seen as a form of 'vertical' political alliance,<sup>23</sup> in contrast to the class, which can be seen as a 'horizontal' type of political alliance. This usage is often taken a stage further. Factions are seen as a form of 'traditional' politics, based on patron-client relationships of a 'traditional' type, in contrast to 'modern' class-based politics. It is with this idea in mind that Myron Weiner has regarded factionalism as a kind of village disease which has infected the body-politic of India.<sup>24</sup>

Linked to both of these usages is the concept that factional conflicts are not ideological conflicts. Faction leaders tend to come from an elite background and tend to have common class interests. They compete amongst themselves for personal power, not because they wish to change the world.<sup>25</sup> Even though they mouth populist slogans with abandon, they have no serious intention of carrying through popular reforms.

The first type of usage—that of factions as political cliques—is both straightforward and rather limited, for it does no more than give a label to the chronic state of conflict between leading Indian politicians. The second type of usage is far more ambitious: no longer is the faction a small clique, but a vast patron-client network. The colony of buzzing bees has turned into what we may call the 'Great Indian Faction'. In this guise, the faction has two main features. First, the faction is held to be a vertical organization; through it the lowest in the land is linked to the highest. Second, such factions are supposed to cut across horizontal social organizations such as classes and castes (in cases where castes constitute class-like structures). If it can be shown that factions of

<sup>22</sup>*The Statesman*, 14 April 1958. Quoted in B.D. Graham, 'The Succession of Factional Systems in the Uttar Pradesh Congress Party 1937-66', in M.J. Swartz, *Local-Level Politics* (London, 1969), p. 356.

<sup>23</sup>Ralph Nicholas, 'Structure of Politics in the Villages of South Asia', in Milton Singer and Bernard Cohn, *Structure and Change in Indian Society* (Chicago, 1968), p. 264.

<sup>24</sup>'... the Congress party... has become a vehicle for village factional disputes'. Myron Weiner, *Party Building in a New Nation: The Indian National Congress* (Chicago, 1967), p. 87.

<sup>25</sup>Bailey, *Stratagems and Spoils*, p. 52.

this type dominate the politics of rural India, then it follows that class and caste are unimportant in rural politics.

Theories as important as this cannot exist only at the level of abstraction, they have to have some empirical justification. At this stage we must, therefore, examine the empirical studies which underpin the theory. At the village level, this is found chiefly in the work of a large number of social anthropologists. Of these, the most influential theoreticians have been Oscar Lewis, F.G. Bailey and Ralph Nicholas. These three scholars carried out their field-work in villages in different parts of India during the 1950s.

The pioneering study of factions was made by Oscar Lewis in a Jat-dominated village to the south of Delhi. Lewis noted the following characteristics of the village faction:<sup>26</sup>

- 1) Factions are vertical groupings within castes.
- 2) Such groups are created by quarrels in the past, usually, according to a popular saying, over wealth, women or land. The insecurity of village life produces mutual interest groups. Increased competition for resources in the twentieth century has probably led to more intense factionalism than in the past.
- 3) Factions tend to follow lines of kinship: '. . . in view of a common misconception, it is important to note that they (factions) are not political groupings, or temporary alliances of individuals to fight court cases, although some of them do take on political functions and become involved in power politics. Rather, they are primarily kinship groupings which carry on important social, economic, and ceremonial functions in addition to their factional struggles against one another. It is these positive functions which account for the remarkable stability of these groups over the years'.<sup>27</sup>
- 4) The main factions of a village are the factions of a dominant caste (Jats in Lewis's village). This is because the dominant caste has political power and is in the strongest position to provide patron figures in the faction. Other castes can have factions, but this is rare, and there are unlikely to be more than two factions in such a caste.

5) Faction leaders tend to be wealthy and respected men within the village. The wealthy leaders act as patrons, they rent out land

<sup>26</sup>This is my own summary of the findings of Chapter Four of Oscar Lewis, *Village Life in Northern India* (Urbana, 1958), pp. 113-54.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 147.

and lend money to the poorer members of the faction. Leaders tend to act as the spokesmen for the faction rather than as dynamic leader-figures, and leadership tends to be oligarchical.

6) There is a tradition of presenting an appearance of village unity to the outside world which makes it hard for the outsider to discern factions within a village. Factions will unite for the good of the village.

In Lewis's work there is little suggestion of the Great Indian Faction. He has merely observed, with considerable insight, the operation of Jat kinship networks within one village and has labelled this phenomenon 'faction'. His sixth point obviously contradicts the notion that factions are vertical organizations which unite district leaders, village bosses and peasant clients, for if there is a tendency for the factions of a village to unite against outsiders, then the district leaders will be unable to recruit support from villagers along factional lines.

This conclusion has been supported by other anthropologists. Adrian Mayer, in his study of a village in Malwa, reports that it was considered not only unlikely, but impossible, for a party within the village to extend its conflicts to levels above that of the village.<sup>28</sup> F.G. Bailey, in his studies of several villages in Orissa, has likewise reported on this tendency for villagers to stick together in their dealings with outsiders.<sup>29</sup> In the same breath, however, he makes the theoretical point that there is a tendency for factions within villages to link up with political parties outside the village.<sup>30</sup> In this case, he fails to provide any empirical evidence to justify his assertion. In fact, the material which he cites shows that the exact opposite occurred.<sup>31</sup> Therefore we can say that, whether they like it or not, anthropologists in general have endorsed Lewis's sixth point. It appears unlikely that faction within a village will undermine village solidarity by extending its support as a *faction* to district or regional-level political groups. From this it

<sup>28</sup> Adrian Mayer, *Caste and Kinship in Central India* (California, 1973), p. 253.

<sup>29</sup> F.G. Bailey, *Caste and the Economic Frontier* (Manchester, 1957), pp. 193-4; F.G. Bailey, *Politics and Social Change: Orissa in 1959* (California, 1963), p. 99.

<sup>30</sup> Bailey, *Politics and Social Change*, pp. 95-6.

<sup>31</sup> In the village which Bailey studied, the traditional village council met together and chose the men who were to represent the village in the local panchayats. As nobody opposed this, the men were returned without election. Bailey reports that there was a general desire in the village to keep out of party politics. As a result he concludes that 'the electoral campaign did not develop along the lines of internal cleavage in the village'. *Ibid.*, pp. 96-9.

follows that there is no structural connection between village-level faction conflicts and district and regional-level factional conflicts. The Great Indian Faction, it appears, has a rather broken chain of command.

After Lewis, the most influential anthropological work on factions was that carried out by Ralph Nicholas in West Bengal. His important paper 'Factions: a Comparative Analysis' was based on a six-month stay in 1959 in the village of Govindapura in Midnapore District.<sup>32</sup> He arrived in the village soon after a gram panchayat election, and much of his time was spent in finding out how and why the people of the village voted as they did. The population of the village was 677, divided by caste as follows: Mahisyas 423, Potters 86, Herdsmen 32, Brahmans 30, other castes 106. The Mahisyas, who therefore made up two-thirds of the village population, were the dominant caste.

As a result of his study, Nicholas concluded that factional conflicts in Govindapura cut across caste lines. Thus, conflicts in the village were not between Mahisyas and Potters or other castes as a whole, but between two factions of the Mahisyas. At one level, this finding was predictable. The Mahisyas were so powerful in the village, both in terms of numbers and economic strength, that it would have been remarkable if conflict had not taken place along such lines. However, if Nicholas was to prove his case, he had to show that subordinate castes, such as the Potters and Herdsmen, were divided in their support for each of the Mahisya factions. He had, in other words, to show that while a significant number of Potters and Herdsmen supported Mahisya faction A, an equally significant number supported Mahisya faction B. Although Nicholas states that this was the case, he fails to demonstrate it with his evidence. In fact, if we look closely at his data, we discover that the reverse held true. We are told at one point that during the 1959 election the leader of the Potters threw his support behind one particular Mahisya leader. In the past, we are told, the leader of the Potters and the vast majority of Potters had remained neutral. What we observe, in other words, are the Potters voting as a bloc, giving their support *en masse* to different politicians, or withholding it, at different times.<sup>33</sup> Nicholas's data suggests,

<sup>32</sup>Ralph Nicholas, 'Factions: a Comparative Analysis', in Michael Banton, (ed.), *Political Systems and the Distribution of Power* (London, 1965).

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 39.

therefore, a distinct disjuncture between the conflicts within the dominant caste and the political organization of the leading subordinate caste.

In addition, Nicholas argues that the 'modern' politics of Govindapura are merely a disguised version of old factional conflicts. Thus he argues that in the gram panchayat election of 1959 the 'Congress' and 'Communist' parties which opposed each other were in fact two traditional village factions whose conflicts he was able to trace back as far as 1910. The 'Congress' revolved around the family of the village headman, a Mahisya (faction A). This was the most powerful faction, as the headman owned more land than anyone else. The 'Communists' were in fact the rival Mahisya faction B. Nicholas attempts to trace the continuity of conflict between faction A and faction B. This exercise soon becomes extremely tortuous, as leading members of each faction crossed over from one side to the other during the period. Things become even more complicated when we find that the leader of the 'Communist faction' in the 1959 election was not a member of family B. Nicholas was informed that family B voted for the Communists, but that they had never given any active support. Even more significant, when the village headman (leader of faction A) put himself up for election to the *anchal* panchayat (a panchayat covering 15 to 20 villages), it was agreed after a little nominal opposition '... that it would not be proper for the village to send someone other than the headman to the *anchal* panchayat'.<sup>34</sup> In the final analysis, therefore, there was a consensus amongst the Mahisyas that the village headman should represent the village in the outside world. Mahisya factionalism was being kept entirely within the Mahisya caste of the village.

Nicholas's description of the Congress and Communist 'factions' merely demonstrates the well-known fact that Indian villages tend to be dominated by powerful families. As the power of these families continues over the generations, it would be surprising if there was not some continuity of conflict between them. As it was, the conflict in Govindapura was rather muted and, as would be expected, when dealing with the outside world or with lower castes these leading families pulled together despite their differences. Nicholas has not told us anything new about village politics in India. One thing he has certainly not proved is that

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 41.

because family B happened to vote Communist in a village election in 1959, the Communist Party of India was merely a faction in a red cap.

Nicholas's case therefore looks rather thin. Yet, on the basis of his research and on his reading of nineteen other village studies, he feels confident enough to formulate the 'rule' that: 'The dominant mode of political conflict in Indian villages is between factions.'<sup>35</sup> This statement can be interpreted in two ways. First, it may be taken as meaning that the dominant conflicts in Indian villages are between groups united by vertical rather than horizontal (or class) ties. Although Nicholas's 'rule' has been accepted in this form by many historians and political scientists, the actual field-data provided by him, and indeed by other anthropologists such as Bailey, does not give us cause to endorse it. Secondly, the 'rule' may be interpreted as saying that the dominant conflicts in Indian villages are between factions rather than between other types of groups bound together by vertical ties. In this case, we must try to discover exactly what 'a faction' is, so that we can distinguish it from these other groups. Nicholas appears to have had both of these interpretations in mind when he formulated his 'rule'. In his essays, however, he has been concerned largely with clarifying the second aspect. He has, in other words, tried to discover the essence of the faction.

Many anthropologists have engaged in this quest. Oscar Lewis, as will be recalled, stated that village factions were kinship groups rather than political groups. Ralph Nicholas denied this: in his opinion factions are political groupings which cut across lines of caste and kinship.<sup>36</sup> In his village study he discovered that the neighbourhood rather than kinship group or lineage was the most important unit of political allegiance.<sup>37</sup> To some extent the differences here would appear to be regional ones. The Jat lineages of northern India (the subject of Lewis's study) appear to possess an unusual degree of solidarity.<sup>38</sup> In the Patidar villages of Kheda District, the lineage (*khadki*) and street of residence (*phaliya*) were, as I have mentioned, often one and the same. So perhaps there is less contradiction here than there might seem. Adrian Mayer, in his

<sup>35</sup>Nicholas, 'Structure of Politics in the Villages of South Asia', p. 278.

<sup>36</sup>Nicholas, 'Factions: a Comparative Analysis', pp. 23, 59.

<sup>37</sup>Nicholas, 'Structure of Politics in the Villages of South Asia', pp. 252-4.

<sup>38</sup>See M. C. Pradhan, *The Political System of the Jats of Northern India*, pp. 213-14.

work, prefers to see a multiplicity of types of faction in the village which he studied. There were Rajput lineage factions (*thar*), political factions which cut across castes (*palti*—after the English word ‘party’), and family factions arising out of disputes over the inheritance of property.<sup>39</sup>

David Pocock has adopted a less positivistic approach to this problem by pointing out the drawbacks of trying to pin down factions in these sorts of ways. Rather than starting by trying to discover the essence of the faction from its list of members, Pocock prefers to pose the question: ‘What is the conflict?’<sup>40</sup> In a dispute over the inheritance of property we would expect brother to fight with brother, just as in a conflict to control the village panchayat we would expect to find two powerful landowners mobilizing people through all sorts of economic ties and kinship links in order to win the election. When we adopt this approach, we find that Nicholas’s ‘rule’ in the second form in which I have interpreted it is tautological, stating merely that as the faction is a political group, political conflict is factional. In examining village factions we must therefore change our question from: ‘What is the predominant mode of political conflict in the Indian village?’ to the question: ‘What are the predominant political alliances which are formed in different types of conflict within Indian villages?’

Let us now turn from the village to the district, which means in effect from the social anthropologist to the political scientist. Whereas anthropologists have tended to make the village their level for analysis, political scientists have often concentrated on the district, an administrative unit which can encompass more than a thousand villages and over a million people. This aspect, in itself, is often ignored when grand theories are set forth about the penetration of villages by district-level factions.

The most influential study of politics at this level has been Paul Brass’s *Factional Politics in an Indian State: The Congress Party in Uttar Pradesh*. It has been highly regarded as a work of political analysis not only amongst academics but also, it is said, amongst Indian politicians who have used the work as a political primer. The empirical base to this book consists of a series of district studies, each of which takes up one chapter. Thus we have chapters entitled: ‘Gonda: Party Rebellion’, ‘Aligarh: Organisational

<sup>39</sup>Mayer, *op. cit.*, pp. 239–41, 262.

<sup>40</sup>Pocock, *op. cit.*, pp. 299–300.

Self-Destruction', 'Deoria: The Politics of Sugar', 'Meerut: Caste and the Congress'.

Brass concentrates his attention on the district-level political boss. The chief reason for this would appear to be that political alliances at this level changed so rapidly that these individuals provided Brass with his only stable point of reference. As a result, he places great emphasis on the personal nature of factions:

The first and most obvious characteristic of contemporary factional politics in the Uttar Pradesh Congress is the predominantly personal nature of factional groups. Although the language of conflict is often phrased in terms of important principles and although a policy issue may sometimes be seized upon as a pretext for factional struggles, factions and factional conflict are organized completely around personalities and around personal enmities among party leaders.<sup>41</sup>

Although Brass's colourful descriptions of these district bosses makes good reading, it seems that he has overemphasized their importance. In practice, many of the men whom he labels 'district bosses' appear to have had rather localized power bases, such as a town or landed estate covering a few villages, and as a result the Congress Party at the district level often consisted of constantly changing coalitions of these small local bosses.<sup>42</sup>

The major weakness of the book, however, lies in Brass's use of the term 'faction'. The term is used very loosely. At one point he considers factions to be a traditional form of political organization:

... factions and factional conflict in India are part of the indigenous social and political order. The leader-follower relationship is a characteristic form of social and political organization in India. Loyalty to a faction is one form of loyalty which is politically important in the traditional order, like loyalty to a lineage group, to a caste, to a village, or a region.<sup>43</sup>

At another point, however, Brass defines factions in a far narrower way, for he makes a distinction between conflict within a party, which is 'factional', and conflict between parties, which is not. Thus in his chapter on Gonda District, he tells us that the Raja of

<sup>41</sup>Brass, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

<sup>42</sup>Of the four districts looked at by Brass, Deoria very obviously conformed to this pattern. Here, Brass says: 'Leaders of strictly local influence and with very small followings join together in loose *ad hoc* alliances.' *Ibid.*, p. 235.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 234.



of Mankapur led a powerful 'faction' within the District Congress Party. In 1955, the Raja was expelled from the Congress Party for indiscipline and he subsequently joined the Swatantra Party. Brass defines this process as 'the development of the Raja's faction into a locally powerful opposition political party . . .'<sup>44</sup> Here we have a remarkable case of instant transformation of 'traditional' factional politics into 'modern' party politics. Later in the book, however, Brass tells us that it is not likely 'that party sentiment or ideology will play much of a role in local politics in India for some time to come, if ever'.<sup>45</sup> Thus we are back to the idea that factions are an irresistible force in Indian politics. Should we not be left baffled by these semantic leaps?

Brass also has the disconcerting habit of labelling almost any conflict (except ones between parties) as 'factional conflict'. Most scholars have distinguished between vertical 'factional' conflicts and horizontal class conflicts. Not so Brass. In the chapter on Deoria District he says that 'factions in Deoria villages tend to follow economic divisions'.<sup>46</sup> Most scholars would consider 'economic' divisions to be class divisions. Brass's narrative shows that this was certainly the case in Deoria District. The District Congress Party was associated with the dominant elements in the villages and the village headmen and village leaders tended to be Congressmen. The opposing socialists, on the other hand, sought their support from the poorer peasants. Brass quotes a local socialist politician: 'The traditional vested interests in the villages exploit the landless labourers and the common villagers. If the *chaudhuri* is a good man, we become weak. If he is a bad man, we thrive because of his evil and generally they are bad men.'<sup>47</sup> And yet Brass describes the socialists as a 'faction'. He thus appears quite happy to label as 'factional' what is essentially class conflict.

From this we must conclude that, as a study of factions, Brass's book has grave limitations. Its strength lies in its vivid sketches of the political bosses. With great clarity, Brass shows us how they maintain their personal standing through the skilful and unscrupulous manipulation of their resources and powers of patronage. The weakness of the book lies in its failure to shed any light on the relationship between district-level politics and village-level politics. As it is, Brass's understanding of village politics appears to have been based largely on the work of Ralph

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 72.<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 164.<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 131.<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 132.

Nicholas.<sup>48</sup> Although he asserts that factions provide the link between the villages and the district, he fails to show how this process operates. To find out more about this we therefore have to turn to other studies. Of these, by far the best is Anthony Carter's *Elite Politics in Rural India: Political Stratification and Political Alliances in Western Maharashtra*.<sup>49</sup>

Carter argues that there is a 'political class' in India. This consists of men with local influence and powers of patronage, such as the leaders of a dominant caste in a village, big landlords, and in the towns the money-lenders and capitalists. Most political conflicts in India represent shifts in horizontal alliances between members of this class. If possible, the 'political class' avoids having to fight elections, for in elections they have to forge vertical alliances to win votes. Elections can be avoided without difficulty in conflicts for the presidentship of local panchayats, co-operative societies and other such bodies, for no direct appeal to the electorate is required by law. But even when elections are required, the 'political class' often avoids an election by settling conflicts beforehand in private. For instance, in a taluka (a district sub-division) of Maharashtra studied by Carter in 1966 there were 51 village panchayat elections, of which only 24 were actually contested.

At times, however, elections have to be fought. When this happens, each politician within a political alliance uses his personal powers of patronage to win votes. Carter writes:

... when a politician does require popular support, most commonly in a contested direct election, he does not recruit it by entering into direct vertical alliances, whether based on issues or patronage, with voters throughout a large political area such as an assembly constituency. Direct vertical alliances occur most frequently within single villages. When a politician needs popular support he recruits it by forming horizontal political alliances, single or multiple, with other elite leaders who can deliver the votes of their own villages.<sup>50</sup>

No one man is likely to have unchallenged power in such a situation, and in practice there are constant changes in leadership on all rungs of the political ladder. This is how Carter explains the

<sup>48</sup>See *ibid.*, p. 234.

<sup>49</sup>Anthony Carter, *Elite Politics in Rural India. Political Stratification and Political Alliances in Western Maharashtra* (Cambridge, 1974).

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 108.

'instability' of Indian politics. He points out that this instability is a veneer; the domination of the élites over society as a whole is highly stable.

Carter therefore prefers to talk of alliances between élite politicians rather than of factional conflicts. For him, Indian politics is typified by the conflict within an oligarchy rather than between vertical political groups which are mobilized only on rare and exceptional occasions, namely during elections. Therefore, once again we find that it is a particular event, an election, which produces the type of vertical mobilization which is often described as factional. And even elections differ in type. When the issues have mattered to the people, as they did during the agitation for a Maharashtra State in 1957, the élite politicians have had to abandon their vertical networks and jump onto the popular bandwagon.

Carter refers to this example only in passing, for his book is concerned chiefly with the analysis of institutionalized politics. In this latter respect, his work is of great value, for he has refused to allow preconceived concepts of 'factional politics' to colour his findings. Unlike some of the other authors we have examined, Carter takes account of the great complexity of rural politics in India. Bearing in mind this complexity, let us end this section of the essay by drawing some conclusions from this review of the empirical work on factions.

First, we have found that it is fruitless to try to discover the 'essence' of the faction. We must look at issues and events rather than at lists of faction members. Using this approach, we can put these studies in better perspective. Much of the analysis of 'factionalism' in rural India has been carried out in terms of election studies. In these elections, the majority of villagers are seen to be voting according to the wishes of their patrons or their caste leaders. The assumption is then made that most political activity in Indian villages follows such lines.<sup>51</sup> But let us ask the question: 'What sort of political conflict takes place in most Indian elections?' These same authors report consistently that Indian peasants have little faith in the electoral process. Politicians are regarded by the peasants as self-seekers out only to feather their

<sup>51</sup>Nicholas, 'Structure of Politics in the Villages of South Asia', p. 278; Hamza Alavi, 'The Politics of Dependence: A Village in West Punjab', *South Asian Review*, 4:2 (Jan. 1971), p.

own nests, and it is popularly believed that whichever government is in power, the condition of the mass of peasants will remain unchanged.<sup>52</sup> If, therefore, it is possible for a peasant to do somebody a favour, keep in with a patron, or earn a little money on the side by voting in a particular way, then he will vote accordingly.<sup>53</sup> It is only on the exceptional occasions, such as during the election of March 1977 which brought an end to the Emergency, that the peasants express their feelings in a strong and united way through the ballot box. In this light, we see that most Indian elections are elite contests in which the majority of peasants have little interest. The elections observed by Bailey, Nicholas and Brass fall into this category, and, consequently, voting has tended to follow the directives of patrons and caste leaders. From such studies we cannot draw any profound conclusions about the nature of political alliances and solidarities in rural India.

Secondly, we discover that the Great Indian Faction is more of a myth than a reality. We find that much of the political conflict described as 'factional' at both district and village level is in fact conflict within an oligarchy. The majority of these contests are resolved without either party having to mobilize support from their clients. In such conflicts, vertical mobilization is therefore the exception rather than the rule. In addition, there is a sharp disjuncture between district-level conflicts and village-level conflicts. Even within the village, conflicts tend to be kept within castes.

Thirdly, we can say that the distinction between factionalism as 'traditional' and class conflict as 'modern' is meaningless. F.G. Bailey has set much store by this idea, arguing that horizontal mobilization could not occur in the traditional Indian village.<sup>54</sup> Bailey's own empirical work, based on an Orissa village, belies this conclusion. In *Tribe, Caste and Nation* he describes fierce clashes which took place in this village during the nineteenth century between the dominant caste and the untouchables, clashes which led to half of it being burnt to the ground.<sup>55</sup> It is of course true that class consciousness is greater today than it was in the past, but it is

<sup>52</sup>Bailey, *Politics and Social Change*, pp.35-6; Paul Brass, *Factional Politics in an Indian State*, p.135.

<sup>53</sup>Bailey, *Politics and Social Change*, pp.32-3.

<sup>54</sup>Bailey, 'Closed Social Stratification in India', *Archives Europeenes de Sociologie*, IV, 1963, p. 118.

<sup>55</sup>Bailey, *Tribe, Caste and Nation: A Study of Political Activity and Political Change in Highland Orissa* (Manchester, 1960), p.146.

absurd to extend this observation into a denial of the very existence of horizontal mobilization in the past. Once again, we must stress that it is the issue or event which creates particular political alliances and networks rather than 'modernity' or 'tradition'. Thus, if we take the issue of usury in nineteenth century Maharashtra we find that it provoked a strong class reaction against Marwari money-lenders. To try to classify this as 'modern' or 'traditional' does not help us to understand any better the history of the Deccan riots of 1875.

The concept is further undermined by Adrian Mayer's observation that political factions in the villages which he studied were called *palti* after the English word 'party'. This appears to be a common practice. Scarlett Epstein, in a study of a village in South India, notes that the peasants used the English word 'party' to describe village factions.<sup>56</sup> In these cases, the political networks formed primarily to win support in elections were a novel type of formation which differed both in composition and quality from the older networks based on family and lineage. Thus, rather than being a traditional element in village society, the political factions formed during elections were, in these cases, a product of the twentieth century. They were, in other words, modern political formations.

#### IV

We find, therefore, that there are many problems with the concept of the faction. In particular, the Great Indian Faction appears to be more of a myth than a reality. Why, therefore, has the concept proved so popular among scholars? Is it merely a product of bad scholarship, or are there more profound reasons for its attraction? In this section of the essay I shall argue that the concept of the faction is determined in part by the intellectual framework within which the majority of western scholars operate and then go on to show that the concept of the Indian faction has proved popular above all because it has accorded with the occidental belief that India is a factious society.

In recent years, the study of factions has been conducted through the language and concepts of social science. This system

<sup>56</sup>T. Scarlett Epstein, *South India: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow. Mysore Villages Revisited* (London, 1973), p.179.

of thought, as it has evolved in Britain and the United States, is rooted in European liberal thought with its tradition of positivist philosophy. Many of the studies of factions are in consequence positivist in approach. Factions are regarded as solid political organizations endowed with particular qualities which can be discovered, it is believed, through research. This quest for the essence of the faction is, as shown above, a futile one, for factions are neither solid nor endowed with any particular essence. In spite of this, the search goes on, with various conflicting definitions and explanations being put forward. These can be fitted into two broad categories: the structural functionalist and the behaviourist.

Structural functionalism has been one of the most important offshoots of positivist philosophy.<sup>57</sup> This school of thought has been associated in particular with British social anthropology and, since the second World War, with American political science. The structural-functionalist views society as an ordered whole. Each person in a society plays a particular role: these roles, taken together, ensure the cohesion and stability of the society. Thus, in the case of India, the landlord provides land for his tenant, the tenant reciprocates with a share of his produce and, at election time, with his vote. There is an assumption here that everyone is benefiting from the system according to what he puts into it. 'Factions' are seen as a necessary part of this structure, for they provide an outlet for social conflict. Conflict is thus kept within limits: it need never threaten the stability of society. Of the authors examined in this essay, Oscar Lewis and Paul Brass fall most clearly into the category of structural-functionalists, both believing that factions play a constructive as well as destructive role in Indian society.

This rather complacent, albeit popular, view of Indian politics has been challenged by the 'harder' arguments of the behaviourists. The behaviourist starts from the assumption that man is a rational being who takes political decisions on rational grounds. By 'rational' is meant the satisfaction of narrow economic interests and the immediate short-term desire for power. Although this strongly materialistic view of political behaviour has proved popular with some so-called Marxists, it is a form of analysis more

<sup>57</sup>For a full discussion of this theme, see Anthony Giddens, 'Positivism and its Critics', in Tom Bottomore and Robert Nisbet (eds), *A History of Sociological Analysis* (London, 1979).

sued to a positivist approach. Behaviourists who are in the positivist tradition tend to start from the assumption that their task is to study 'solid' political networks engaged in formal political conflict. These networks must be shown to be bound together by strong and unambiguous politico-economic ties. This approach, taken to its logical extreme, leads political scientists towards the quantification of such ties, and as W.J.M. Mackenzie observes: '... the related observational techniques can cope rigorously only with voting situations, and not with all of these'.<sup>58</sup> In the West, behaviourists study parties engaged in elections. In India they study factions.<sup>59</sup>

This approach is taken to its limits in a study of factions in Maharashtra by Mary Carras.<sup>60</sup> The problem which she set herself was to explain political alignments in India: were they made on the basis of loyalty to caste and community, of loyalty to a charismatic leader, or were they made on 'rational' grounds? To find this out, she analysed the election of the presidents of four Jhilla Parishads (District Councils) in Maharashtra in 1962. The presidents were elected by the members of the Jhilla Parishad, so that, for Carras's purpose, the electorate was conveniently circumscribed. She drew up lists of all the councillors, compiled mountains of data on their socio-economic backgrounds, and allocated them to a 'faction' according to how they voted in each election. After a daunting exercise in quantitative analysis which produced a 49-page appendix of statistics and a 29-page 'note on methodology', she reached her conclusion as follows:

Evidence has been advanced to show that the 'factional' behaviour of political actors corresponds, on the whole, with rational (or calculable) economic interests; that it is not determined by 'irrational' (that is, emotional) and often unpredictable personal loyalties which may be based almost exclusively on feelings of awe, respect or devotion to a leader because of his charismatic qualities, or on feelings of loyalty evoked by caste or community ties or by family links.<sup>61</sup>

This conclusion would have been valuable if it had not been such a foregone conclusion, for Carras has already ensured these results

<sup>58</sup>W.J.M. Mackenzie, *Politics and Social Science* (Harmondsworth, 1967), p.137.

<sup>59</sup>It may be noted that the behaviourist school of modern Indian History, as represented by Baker, Washbrook and others, does not go in for rigorous quantification in their study of factions. The historical data available to them is obviously unsuitable for such exercises.

<sup>60</sup>Mary C. Carras, *The Dynamics of Indian Political Factions: A Study of District Councils in the State of Maharashtra* (Cambridge, 1972).

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 184.

when, right at the start of the book, she says that all loyalties to leaders, castes and communities are irrational or mystical bonds which cannot be used as a basis for her rigorous analysis.<sup>62</sup> By this, she means that they cannot be quantified. She thus throws out the baby with the bathwater. The other mistaken assumption which runs through the book is the idea that political alignments within a District Council shed light on Indian political behaviour as a whole. All in all, therefore, the behaviourist study of factions has produced results no more satisfactory than the structural-functionalists.

Despite their differences these various schools of thought can be seen to share a common assumption: that Indian politics are factional because India is, by tradition, a factious society. Although there is ceaseless debate about the essence of factionalism, little attempt is made to query this basic assumption. The notion is accepted because it is an old one, with, it seems, firm intellectual roots. It is, however, highly questionable.

We can see this view emerging in the reminiscences of the British Collector, R. Carstairs,<sup>63</sup> who served in Bengal in the late nineteenth century. Describing his tour of Tipperah District of East Bengal he wrote:

. . . in every village there were generally faction feuds raging. Active minds were busy . . . devising plans for dishing the other side, detaching members from it, and generally putting their own side ahead.<sup>64</sup>

On his experiences in Serampore he wrote:

It was a common official complaint that there was no public spirit in the land. The people were all, high and low, given up to 'doladoli' [factionalism], and any public body that could be set up in the villages would be captured by, and become a prey to this fell demon.<sup>65</sup>

Factionousness is depicted by Carstairs as a positive demonic force which haunts Indian society, wrecking the attempts made by the British to establish modern democratic institutions. Indian politicians are seen to be incapable of working together for the good of their country. From this standpoint, India is condemned by her history and culture to a state of perpetual, crippling conflict.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., pp.7-8.

<sup>63</sup>R. Carstairs, *The Little World of an Indian District Officer* (London,1912).

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p.26.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 174.



This pessimistic view is as popular today as ever. Paul Brass writes:

Nor is it likely that party sentiment or ideology will play much of a role in local politics in India for some time to come, if ever. However, it is quite likely that factionalism will play a continuously increasing role in Indian elections, just as it has already come to dominate party politics not only in Uttar Pradesh, but in other Indian states as well.<sup>66</sup>

Like Carstairs, Brass depicts factionalism as a positive force, a cancer which spreads irresistibly through India's political institutions. India thus stands cursed and condemned by the fact that her politicians have been, and always will be, ruled by powers beyond their control.

Views such as these are by no means eccentric or peculiar to Indian Studies. As Edward Said has shown in his book *Orientalism*, such assertions have been the common stock of western studies of eastern societies for over two centuries.<sup>67</sup> Orientalism of this type is characterized by stereotyped views of the East and Eastern peoples. Although these views take many forms, often contradictory, one which we find appearing time and time again in the study of factions is the belief that Asiatic people spend their lives fighting amongst themselves in an irrational manner. As an example of this view, let us examine some statements made by the American scholar Harold W. Glidden in an essay of 1972 called 'The Arab World'. Glidden claims to understand what he called 'the inner workings of Arab behaviour'. He writes (as summarized by Edward Said):

'... it is a notable fact that while the Arab value system demands absolute solidarity within the group, it at the same time encourages among its members a kind of rivalry that is destructive of that very solidarity'; in Arab society only 'success counts' and 'the end justifies the means'; Arabs live 'naturally' in a world 'characterized by anxiety expressed in generalized suspicion and distrust, which has been labelled free-floating hostility'; 'the art of subterfuge is highly developed in Arab life, as well as in Islam itself'; the Arab need for vengeance overrides everything, otherwise the Arab would feel 'ego-destroying' shame.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>66</sup>Brass, *op cit*, p.164.

<sup>67</sup>Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London, 1980). See in particular pp.293-305.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.48-9.

Glidden is arguing that individual Arabs have an almost psychopathic regard for their personal prestige. As a result, they are condemned by their culture to live in a state of perpetual factiousness. They are therefore unable to function in a 'modern' political manner.

Returning to India, we discover that Paul Brass holds similar views:

Factional conflicts in traditional societies are personal politics and status politics. Conflicts of prestige between faction leaders lead to intense factional disputes which are often in their very nature insoluble. When prestige or honour become of primary importance in politics, the possibilities of resolving conflicts are reduced, for honour cannot be shared.<sup>69</sup>

Brass is more moderate in tone than Glidden, but his Orientalist psychologizing is of a similar quality. Indian politics, like Arab politics, are understood in terms of personal vendettas. Indian politicians, too, appear to live their lives ruled by irrational passions. They hold Kiplingesque beliefs, such as that 'honour cannot be shared'. They are, in all, true Orientals. Let us examine another passage from Brass:

The inner core of a faction, which is usually very small, is bound together by a relationship which is in many ways similar to the *guru*-disciple relationship in education and religion—a relationship which is cemented by the warmest personal ties of affection and loyalty between master and disciple, leader and follower. It is the closeness of the ties among the members of the inner circle which often makes for the most intense hatred of those outside the faction. The faction leader is literally a potentate for a small circle of followers, for whom he holds a nightly *darbar* and from whom he expects unswerving and unquestioning loyalty. Men who are used to such esteem as part of their daily lives are quick to take offense when those outside the circle do not offer them sufficient respect. Trivial misunderstandings between faction leaders can lead to a lifelong enmity. As a result, an atmosphere of bitterness pervades contemporary politics in the Uttar Pradesh Congress.<sup>70</sup>

The statement in this paragraph is contradictory, though full of meaning. On the one hand, the faction leader is depicted as an inscrutable Oriental mystic—the 'guru' figure—on the other hand, he is seen as a 'potentate' (such an emotive term, so sugges-

<sup>69</sup>Brass, *op. cit.*, p. 240.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 55.

tive of Arabian fairy tales!), in other words an 'Oriental Despot' rooted in hoary tradition. Being an Oriental, the Indian politician is, in contrast we must assume with western politicians, 'quick to take offense' when he is not offered 'sufficient respect', and he harbours 'lifelong enmities' of an irrational type. Thus, although the argument is lax, there is no doubt about the meaning which Brass seeks to convey.<sup>71</sup>

Not all the writers on Indian factions accept that Indians are irrational. The behaviourists, as we have seen, believe that there are normally rational economic explanations for political actions. Despite this, most agree with the general concept that India is a factious society. It is only the *causes* of factionalism which they dispute. This general consensus on the 'factiousness of the Indian' (whether rational or irrational) rests on another Orientalist assumption: that Asiatic society is a rather simple type of social formation, characterized by a strongly autocratic ruling class placed over a huge undifferentiated mass of subjects who are incapable of forming their own political organizations. These masses can only participate in politics as the malleable clients of elite politicians, and, in dealing with 'mass politics', we are, it is believed, dealing with patron-client networks or, to use a variation of the concept, factions.<sup>72</sup> According to such a vision, all we need to do to understand Oriental politics is to study the elites and assume that the masses will follow them in an unquestioning manner. This, clearly, has been Brass's approach: his study concentrates on the party bosses to the almost complete exclusion of the subaltern classes. Despite this, he feels qualified to assert that 'factional loyalties provide the link between the parochial units of Indian society—family, village, caste—and the political parties'.<sup>73</sup>

Why do modern scholars accept these views so uncritically? It is easy enough to see why European colonial officials believed in such theories: they had a vested interest in denying freedom to their colonial subjects. But why should modern Americans go

<sup>71</sup>For similar assumptions from a historian see Johnson, *op. cit.*, p.50: 'The pattern of all-India politics were made by a handful of men in constant tension with one another, and the continual struggle for recognition and for the maintenance of prestige and position in national affairs was conducted within a small arena.'

<sup>72</sup>For a statement of these views by a scholar who accepts them, see B.R. Tomlinson, *The Indian National Congress and the Raj 1929-1942*, *op. cit.*, p.75. These sentiments are held by many Indian scholars also. Tomlinson quotes Rajni Kothari's view that the Indian electorate is 'politically speaking . . . an amorphous mass, unorganized and undifferentiated'.

<sup>73</sup>Brass, *Factional Politics in an Indian State*, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

along with these doctrines? How can they ignore the strong evidence of political assertion by peasants in twentieth-century China, Vietnam and even India? The answer is that Orientalism fulfils ideological and intellectual needs. Ideologically, it serves imperialist and neo-colonialist interests by denying that revolutionary peasants are their own masters. Intellectually, it provides one of the chief props for the modern study of the 'developing nations'. In these writings, the globe is divided into the new version of East and West, the 'developing' and the 'developed' regions. 'Developed' societies, such as Britain and the United States, are compared with a huge mass of 'developing' societies, which are distinguished one from the other in a most crude and sketchy manner.<sup>74</sup>

The new Orientalism, like the old, is based on the premise that there are fundamental differences between East and West. Political practices which would not be tolerated in the west are found acceptable in 'developing' nations, for it is supposed that they serve a necessary functional purpose. It is believed that these so-called 'traditional' practices can somehow provide the building blocks for 'modern' and 'integrated' political systems. Revolution can thereby be avoided. Patron-client networks are considered to be one such traditional institution: In the words of Donal Cruise O'Brien:

The fragile connection of local and central institutions [in the developing nations] has recently led some political scientists and anthropologists to an almost obsessive concern with the informal 'patron-client' or 'brokerage' structures which at least ensure some communication between centre and periphery through a chain of dyadic links.<sup>75</sup>

In the case of India, factions were discovered and found to be good. Oscar Lewis stressed that the outside reformer had only to convert the 'faction-leader' and he had a large chunk of the village on his side.<sup>76</sup> Myron Weiner believed that faction leaders were needed to cut through the red tape of a sluggish bureaucracy to 'get things done'.<sup>77</sup> Paul Brass saw factionalism as a transitional stage in the growth of democracy in India.<sup>78</sup> We are thus left with the impres-

<sup>74</sup>For an example of such an exercise see Gabriel Almond and James Coleman (eds), *The Politics of the Developing Areas* (Princeton, 1960).

<sup>75</sup>Donal Cruise O'Brien, 'Modernisation, Order, and the Erosion of a Democratic Ideal: American Political Science 1960-70', *The Journal of Development Studies*, 8:4 (July 1972), p. 357.

<sup>76</sup>Lewis, op. cit., p.151.

<sup>77</sup>Weiner, op.cit., pp 487-8.

<sup>78</sup>Brass, op. cit , p.114.

sion that Indian factionalism is, despite its malaise, a force for progress.

In this manner, many western social scientists and historians continue to regard India through Orientalist eyes. This underlying structure to their thought is often ignored because of their use of modern 'scientific' language and sophisticated forms of analysis. These have indeed been so persuasive that even Marxist writers, such as Hamza Alavi, have felt a need to emphasize the role of factions in their studies of rural politics.<sup>79</sup> However, once we expose the premises on which these writings are based they lose much of their validity, for, as this essay has attempted to show, there are no real grounds for believing factionalism to be more central to Indian political life than conflict between classes.

## V

The concept of 'the Indian faction' thus appears somewhat vacuous. But is it without any value at all? Assuming that the term is used with precision, can we not find a place for it in the study of Indian politics and history? Yes, if we restrict the term to mean those political cliques which struggle amongst themselves for power and whose members hold broadly similar class interests.

We must however be careful to stress that there is no direct linear connection or structural identity between such political cliques at the all-India and provincial levels and the conflict groups at village level. When dealing with conflicts at the village level, it is wisest to follow the practice of Adrian Mayer and specify each type of conflict group and, if possible, give it a separate name. This method provides the best safeguard against sloppy scholarship.

There is therefore room for the queen bee and her colony. But the concept of the Great Indian Faction should be rejected. Not only is it wrong, but it bears the stigma of being used as a tool of analysis by those who have sought to exercise control over India and limit the freedom of the Indian people. The concept is inseparable from the colonial and neo-colonial domination of India by western powers.

There is, in addition, nothing in the idea which cannot be

<sup>79</sup>Hamza Alavi, 'The Politics of Dependence: A Village in West Punjab', p.112; Hamza Alavi, 'Peasant Classes and Primordial Loyalties', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 1:1 (Oct. 1973), pp. 43-9.

explained better through the concept of class. The theory of the Great Indian Faction is supposed to explain the political mobilization of the subaltern classes by the elites. All it does in fact is to pinpoint certain aspects of class collaboration. Class collaboration occurs when members of subaltern classes believe that it is in their best interests to collaborate with members of higher classes. This may be because of economic ties, or perhaps because of ties of caste and kinship which require 'brothers' to stick together. Class collaboration may be achieved through the threat of force—by, for instance, the landlord's henchmen ready to beat up the poor peasant who refuses political support. Whatever stability Indian society has had has depended to a large extent on the operation of such processes. Our task in studying the relationship between the subaltern classes and the elites should not be to trace so-called 'factional networks', but to ask why class collaboration has predominated at particular historical junctures. An election, a labour dispute, a land redistribution by law, a mass agitation, a peasant insurrection, all produce their own patterns of class collaboration and class solidarity, patterns which change day by day. Although these ever-moving configurations are hard to trace, the student of Indian politics and history should not be content to lump his prejudice and ignorance under the catch-phrase 'faction'. Rather, he must face his responsibility and make every effort to understand each particular pattern as best he can.



# Glossary<sup>1</sup>

<i>abkari</i>	Excise.
<i>arahtia</i>	A commission agent; normally has some storage facilities too.
<i>amla</i>	Landlord's managerial staff.
<i>anchal panchayat</i>	A <i>panchayat</i> (q.v.) covering 15 to 20 villages.
<i>bangar</i>	Upland; name of a particular type of soil, as distinguished from <i>bhat</i> (q.v.) in Gorakhpur district of U.P.
<i>bania</i>	Merchant.
<i>bedakhli</i>	Ejectment; eviction from land held as tenant/sub-tenant.
<i>beegah</i>	See <i>bigha</i> below.
<i>begar</i>	Forced labour.
<i>bel</i>	Lit. a tendril. An open pan surface for preparing a specific kind of raw sugar. Prevalent in the Rohilkhand division of U.P.
<i>beopari</i>	Small scale itinerant trader.
<i>bhadai</i>	Used generally to denote early <i>kharif</i> crops.
<i>bhat</i>	A type of soil in Gorakhpur district of U.P., it is differentiated from <i>bangar</i> (q.v.) thus: 'So far as the influence of the Gandak reaches, the soil is <i>bhat</i> , a calcareous alluvium of a peculiar type, rarely met with in this country. When the influence of the Gandak ends, the soil is a familiar sandy loam, varying from medium stiff to distinctly light in texture. This is locally known as <i>bangar</i> .' <sup>1</sup> <i>Final Report on the Revision of Settlement in the Gorakhpur District: Tahsils Padrauna Hata and Deoria</i> (Allahabad 1919).
<i>bheli</i>	Round lumps of <i>gur</i> (q.v.)
<i>bigha</i>	A measure of land. Usually five-eighths of an acre, but varies from locality to locality. In Gorakhpur roughly one-third of an acre. Various forms—e.g. <i>pargana bigha</i> , <i>pakka bigha</i> , <i>katcha bigha</i> , etc.

<sup>1</sup> We are most grateful to Dipesh Chakrabarty for his help in preparing this Glossary and the Index which follows it—Ed.



<i>bisar</i>	Loan of seed upon stipulation of ample refund after harvest.
<i>char</i>	Alluvial land exposed by change in the course of a river.
<i>chawal</i>	Unhusked rice.
<i>chuhla</i>	An oven or a furnace.
<i>dakhildar</i>	Occupancy tenant.
<i>dal</i>	Faction.
<i>dadān</i>	Advances given to the peasantry for the production of specific agricultural commodities, generally based on hypothecation of the produce.
<i>dalapati</i>	Faction leader.
<i>Dasara</i>	A Hindu festival.
<i>dasturdehi</i>	<i>Dastur</i> (tradition) + <i>deh</i> (village): village customs entered in the village revenue papers.
<i>deorha</i>	One and a half times; 50% rate (of interest).
<i>dhan</i>	Rice in husk.
<i>doladoli</i>	Factionalism.
<i>dub</i>	Grass used for cattle fodder.
<i>durgam</i>	A rank lower than and subordinate to that of the <i>muttadar</i> (q.v.) in the hierarchy of landholding and local power structure in Telugu country.
<i>fasli</i>	'A season, crop, harvest, and hence the term <i>fasli</i> is applied to the era established with reference to the harvests of Hindustan' (Beames, <i>Elementary Glossary</i> , ii, 158). Akbar declared 10 September A.D. 1555 to be the beginning of 963 <i>fasli</i> . <i>Fasli</i> year can be converted into A.D. by adding 592 or 593, depending upon the month.
<i>fituri</i>	Uprising; rebellion. Hence,— <i>dar</i> : rebel.
<i>gandasi</i>	A fodder cutter, analogous to the <i>machete</i> .
<i>ghair-dakhilkar</i>	Non-occupancy tenant.
<i>ghaniwaha</i>	Specialized labourers working the village <i>kolhu</i> (q.v.)
<i>gol</i>	Patidar marriage circle.
<i>gumashta</i>	Steward; agent.
<i>gur</i>	Unrefined raw sugar.
<i>gurai</i>	Loan raised on the security of cane fields and/or the hypothecation of the <i>gur</i> (q.v.) produced.
<i>halwai</i>	A confectioner.
<i>hansia</i>	An unserrated sickle.
<i>hari</i>	Obligatory supply of labour at certain times (from <i>hali</i> : labourer).

<i>harjinsa</i>	Lit. all kinds of crop, except transplanted rice. Hence <i>harjinsa</i> , for lands or fields which were basically devoted to <i>rabi</i> (q.v.) crops.
<i>harsajh</i>	A system by which the peasants of U.P. pooled their resources to carry on the repeated preparatory tillage necessary for growing cane. <i>Har</i> = plough; <i>Sajhiya</i> = partnership.
<i>hartal</i>	Shut-down of shops, commercial establishments, transport, etc., usually as a mark of political protest.
<i>hat</i>	Village mart.
<i>jhilla parishad</i>	District Council.
<i>jotdar</i>	Large landowner, holding rights of either intermediate tenure or mere tenancy, sometimes having tenants under him and often engaging in moneylending or grain dealing.
<i>kacheri</i>	Office of a landlord's estate.
<i>karah</i>	Pan used for boiling sugarcane juice.
<i>karbi</i>	A manufactory.
<i>karkhana</i>	Sugar refinery. Hence, <i>Karkhanedar</i> . a sugar refiner.
<i>katarwah</i>	The bullock driver for the <i>kolhu</i> (q.v.).
<i>kattubadi</i>	A fixed quit-rent assessed on lands granted to public servants in Telugu country, especially, village servants, such as watchmen, etc.
<i>kavalkari</i>	Tenure of land and office held by a village watchman or by implication someone in the position of a local guardian of law and order in a rural area.
<i>khadi</i>	Homespun cloth.
<i>khadki</i>	Minor lineages of dominant Patidars.
<i>khandsari</i>	A manufacturer of indigenous sugar who functions as landlord and/or moneylender.
<i>khargo</i>	Sword of a somewhat antique design used for animal sacrifice addressed to Hindu deities.
<i>kharif</i>	The autumn harvest.
<i>khoiya</i>	Fibrous residue after expression of juice from sugarcane. Used as fuel in <i>gur</i> (q.v.) and <i>raab</i> (q.v.) production.
<i>kist</i>	An instalment of <i>kattubadi</i> (q.v.).
<i>kiyari</i>	Garden plots.
<i>kolhu</i>	A sugarcane crusher.
<i>kolhuar</i>	Place where cane is crushed and <i>gur</i> (q.v.) manufactured.

<i>kolhuawan</i>	Tax on <i>kolhus</i> (q.v.) levied by the zamindar.
<i>kudhali</i>	Hoe.
<i>kutchā (katcha)</i>	Raw, makeshift, non-standardized.
<i>lagarhi panseri</i>	'The tricky five-seer weight.' Used specifically for the false weights of the merchant-money-lenders dealing in <i>gur</i> (q.v.).
<i>launihars</i>	Rice reapers.
<i>mahajan</i>	Banker; trader; moneylender.
<i>mahisya</i>	A dominant caste in southern Bengal.
<i>mansabdar</i>	A member of the local elite of the highest rank in Telugu country. Hence, -i: (a.) appertaining to a—; (n.) estate, office, etc of a—.
<i>matadar</i>	Elderly leaders of a <i>khadki</i> (q.v.).
<i>matha</i>	A pitcher for carrying juice in.
<i>maund</i>	A unit of weight, roughly equal to 82 lbs.
<i>maurusi</i>	Land held under stable, occupancy tenure ( <i>ghair-</i> : without such occupancy rights).
<i>mokhasadar</i>	Holder of a <i>mokhasa</i> tenure of village or land assigned to an individual either free or at a low quit-rent on condition of service in Telugu country.
<i>mufassil</i>	Interior.
<i>mutta</i>	A large estate, usually comprising several villages in Andhra. Hence, —dar: holder of a —; and —dari: appertaining to a —dar.
<i>naib</i>	Manager or high official of a landlord's estate.
<i>nakshatra</i>	Lunar asterisms.
<i>nazrana</i>	Premium paid by tenant/sub-tenant for admission or re-admission to a holding. Generally, a form of illegally extracted dues.
<i>nilhe saheb</i>	Indigo planter.
<i>paik</i>	Armed peon.
<i>pakwa (or jhokwa)</i>	The indigenous <i>gur</i> (q.v.) boiler.
<i>palti</i>	A Hindi adaptation of the English word 'party'.
<i>pargana</i>	A subdivision within a <i>tahsil</i> (q.v.).
<i>patanar</i>	A foot-long piece of cane.
<i>patidar</i>	A dominant caste of Gujarat.
<i>paunda</i>	A type of cane grown in U.P.
<i>peshgi</i>	Advance.
<i>peshkush</i>	Tribute customarily paid by a feudal chief to his superior.
<i>phaliya</i>	Street of residence of a <i>khadki</i> (q.v.).
<i>podu</i>	Shifting cultivation; land cleared from jungle and prepared for cultivation in Telugu country.

<i>Pongal</i>	A popular festival in many parts of southern India.
<i>potai</i>	From <i>pot</i> = rent. A loan for the payment of a rent instalment.
<i>praja</i>	Tenant.
<i>punya</i>	Spiritual merit.
<i>purabiya</i>	Lit. of the east; (here, eastern U.P.).
<i>qist</i>	Rent instalment.
<i>raab</i>	A semi-solid and semi-crystallized raw sugar, used as an ingredient for manufacturing <i>khand</i> (indigenous sugar).
<i>rabi</i>	The spring harvest.
<i>raiyat</i>	Officially recognized tenant; peasant.
<i>ras</i>	Cane juice.
<i>rasad</i>	A grain levy imposed by the State or feudal chiefs in former times to provide for troops on the march or for hunting expeditions.
<i>ratoon</i>	A second crop (also called <i>peri</i> in Gorakhpur).
<i>ryot</i>	See <i>raiyat</i> above.
<i>sajhiya</i>	Cooperation.
<i>sahukar</i>	Moneylender.
<i>sankirtan</i>	Musical procession, especially on the occasion of Vaishnav religious festivals.
<i>sanyasi</i>	A Hindu holy man who, ideally speaking, withdraws from worldly affairs to devote himself exclusively to spiritual pursuits.
<i>sarkar</i>	Government.
<i>sawai</i>	From <i>sawa</i> = a quarter; 25% rate of interest.
<i>sir</i>	Land held by a zamindar or landowner under title of personal cultivation.
<i>tahsil</i>	A subdivision within a district
<i>taluka</i>	A district sub-division.
<i>talukdar</i>	Intermediate tenureholding landlord in Bengal.
<i>talukdar</i>	Holder of a title to a <i>taluka</i> or regional sub-division, comprising several <i>mahals</i> (revenue-paying units) in Awadh.
<i>tamasha</i>	Entertainment on public occasions.
<i>tao</i>	A unit measuring the amount of cane-juice boiled at any one time.
<i>tappa</i>	An administrative division smaller than a <i>tahsil</i> (sub-division).
<i>tarai</i>	The Himalayan foothills, stretching in U.P. from Pilibhit to Gorakhpur.
<i>tehi</i>	A member of the caste of oil-pressers, some of whom acted as moneylenders as well.

<i>thar</i>	A Rajput lineage faction.
<i>thekadar</i>	A long-term leaseholder who collected rents on behalf of <i>taluqdars</i> (q.v.) in Awadh.
<i>tijara</i>	A system whereby a U.P. peasant without bullocks worked two days for another cultivator and got the use of his plough in exchange for the third.
<i>ulema</i>	Muslim ecclesiastical order; learned men among Muslim priests and theologians.
<i>under raiyat</i>	Officially recognized under-tenant.
<i>vanya</i>	Name of a trading caste.
<i>vetti</i>	Unpaid labour extracted by the rural elite from their subordinates, especially for work on land.

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